



CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE MUSEUM; RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES OF CARE

MARIA THEODORAKI

DOCTORATE IN CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION
OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

NOVA University Lisbon
November, 2021

CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE MUSEUM; RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES OF CARE

MARIA THEODORAKI

Adviser: Rita Andreia Silva Pinto de Macedo,
Assistant Professor, School of Sciences and Technology of NOVA University Lisbon

Examination Committee:

- Chair:** Jorge Orestes Lasbarrères Cerdeira,
Full Professor, School of Sciences and Technology of
NOVA University Lisbon
- Rapporteurs:** Erma Hermens,
Director of the Hamilton Kerr Institute, Cambridge
Lúcia Almeida Matos,
Associate Professor and Dean of Fine Arts Faculty,
University of Porto
- Adviser:** Rita Andreia Silva Pinto de Macedo,
Assistant Professor, School of Sciences and Technology of
NOVA University Lisbon
- Members:** Andreia Magalhães,
Director of Arte Oliva Centre
Joana Lia Antunes Ferreira Marçal Grilo,
Assistant Professor, School of Sciences and Technology of
NOVA University Lisbon

Contemporary art in the museum; responsibilities and professional roles of care

Copyright © Maria Theodoraki, NOVA School of Science and Technology, NOVA University Lisbon. The NOVA School of Science and Technology and the NOVA University Lisbon have the right, perpetual and without geographical boundaries, to file and publish this dissertation through printed copies reproduced on paper or on digital form, or by any other means known or that may be invented, and to disseminate through scientific repositories and admit its copying and distribution for non-commercial, educational or research purposes, as long as credit is given to the author and editor.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 642892



Στους γονείς μου Αργυρώ και Παναγιώτη
που γεννήθηκαν μέσα στον πόλεμο και δεν
είχαν την δυνατότητα να τελειώσουν το
σχολείο. Δημιουργικοί, γενναιόδωροι και
δίκαιοι, αποτελούν για μένα το παράδειγμα
για το τι είναι σημαντικό.

To my parents Argiro and Panagiotis who
were born during the war and did not have
the means to finish school. Creative,
generous and ethical, they are my example
for what matters in life.

Acknowledgments

This statement of gratitude is also intended as a brief chronicle on how I was led to pause my exhibition practice as an artist to pursue theoretical research on the mission of safeguarding an artwork's authenticity and identity.

As part of my nomination for the 2013 DESTE prize for contemporary art in Greece, I was to present a new artwork in a five-month exhibition at the Museum of Cycladic Art (MCA) in Athens. I designed an installation that was to incorporate a wooden crate and two stacks of 2000 A4 pages each, standing freely on the museum floor. The A4 pages were printed hand-outs of a text I wrote and were available to visitors. The curators of the Museum wanted me to add plexiglass casings to house the papers. They worried that, otherwise, the paper columns will be destructed by the visitors and the pages will be scattered around the floor. For me, having the paper columns free standing was fundamental to the work and I was not to accept any alternative. I had trust in the audience, but even if they were to scatter the pages on the floor, it was an acceptable development.

Negotiations, like this one with the MCA, intensified my interest in exploring how we make the identity of an artwork understood and respected. Starting from an interest based on my personal experiences, to conducting the multifaceted research for this doctorate, and bringing the research to fruition through this thesis, was a long and at times painful journey. Many people supported me in these processes and I would like to express here my gratitude.

I want to thank the European Union, for the life-changing Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Networks and for deciding to invest five million euros for doctoral research on the challenges of contemporary art stewardship.

This research and doctorate would not have been possible without the continual support of my supervisor, Prof. Rita Macedo. I want to thank her for her wise questioning of all my presumptions and for offering me the invaluable opportunity to conduct this research as part of the international programme New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art (NACCA) — my gratitude extends to the group's leaders and founders, especially Prof. Renée van de Vall and Prof. Vivian van Saaze. Further, I am grateful to Prof. Lúcia Almeida Matos and Dr. Erma Hermens for their advice, discussions, and comments on my drafts.

Additionally, I want to thank my NACCA colleagues for our valuable debates: Nina Quabeck, Aga Wielocha, Claudia Röck, Caitlin Spangler-Bickell, Marta Garcia, Zoe Miller, Dusan Barok, Sophie Lei, Joanna Kiliszek, Iona Goldie-Scot, Artemis Rüstau, Panda Haan, Brian Castriota, and Tomas Markevicius. Also, Hélia Marçal, Andreia Nogueira, and especially Ana Maria Alonso Martins for helping me with everything I needed as a foreign student in a Portuguese University.

My gratitude goes to the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum (CGM) and to SFMOMA (especially Jill Sterrett) for welcoming me to work with them and study their practices. And, I am grateful to the interviewees and discussants who contributed to this research. From CGM: Penelope Curtis, Rita Fabiana, Ana Vasconcelos, Rui Xavier, Sofia Mendes, and Rosário Ricardo. From SFMOMA: Jill Sterrett, Rudolf Frieling, Robin Clark, Sarah Roberts, Michelle Barger, Roberta Piantavigna, Martina Haidvogel, Clément Chéroux, Mark Hellar, Jovanna Venegas, Danica Gomes, Maria Naula, Kelly Parady, and Grace Weiss. To industry professionals: Pip

Laurenson, Glenn Wharton, Christine Frohnert, Joanna Phillips, Nat Trotman, Elena Crippa, Lluisa Sarries, Leslie Carlyle, Nina Quabeck, Nora Kennedy, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Marina Pugliese, Miguel Wandschneider, Peter Samis, Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, and Peter Ballantine. And, to the artists: Julia Sher, Alexandre Estrela, Tamás Kaszás, and António Ole.

Going back to 2009, I would like to thank Sally O'Reilly for her brilliant tutoring during my Master's studies in Central Saint Martins and for introducing me to the work of Martha Buskirk and her inspiring book *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*. I would also like to thank Dr. Athanasios Velios and Prof. Jo Melvin from Chelsea College of Art for discussing with me my early ideas on contemporary art stewardship and encouraging me to embark on a theoretical doctorate. I am also grateful to Dr. Jennifer Murray for introducing me to NACCA and insisting that I apply to do my doctorate as part of their programme.

A warm thank you to Alexander Bridi and Djelal Osman for our discussions and their support in my use of the English language in this thesis; and to Filipa Alves de Sousa for translating the thesis abstract into Portuguese.

I am very grateful to my friend and philosophy professor Katerina Bantinaki, for motivating me on difficult moments, discussing with me my ideas, scrutinizing my arguments and helping me with the structure of this thesis.

Lastly, I want to thank my dear friends: Raquel, Eduardo, Luisa, and Filipa for being always there for me throughout this journey.



Installation shot of *Irodotou 1* (2013) by Maria Theodoraki,
Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens, Greece

Abstract

This thesis investigates the professional roles responsible for perpetuating contemporary artworks, using the term “perpetuation” to refer to a holistic preservation of the integral components (material and/or immaterial) of an artwork over time. A contemporary artwork is re-enacted differently between exhibitions: materials are replaced, time-based media equipment and formats are changed and spatial arrangements are altered. A work can start as a performance and over the years develop into an object, or vice versa. There is change to be prevented and change to be cherished; every artwork has its own rules, and there are even cases where these rules are meant to be altered over time. Contemporary art, as sociologist Nathalie Heinich has argued, constitutes a new paradigm of art, distinct from traditional and modern. Contemporary artworks transgress conventional barriers, are highly idiosyncratic, and have a disposition to embrace change. As a result, the identity and ontology of a contemporary artwork are not self-evident, leading to a requirement of extensive and thorough research and documentation of the artist’s intent, as well as of the artwork’s institutional life. This requirement has proven challenging to institutions. Through literature review, a field-study and 27 semi-structured expert interviews, this thesis seeks to investigate the ways in which this requirement challenges traditional museum roles, namely, conservators and curators. It concludes that this demanding requirement posed by contemporary artworks is difficult to be fulfilled when added as a peripheral responsibility to the many primary responsibilities conservators and curators have. The thesis proposes the establishment of a new museum role: a collaborator to conservators and curators; a researcher with the role of understanding and documenting the identity and ontology of a contemporary artwork, tracing the artist’s intent, as well as the rationale of institutional decision-making — supporting a clear, effective and well-documented reflection back and forth from the archive to the exhibition space.

Keywords: contemporary art; collection care; conservator; curator; artist’s intent; managing change

Resumo

Esta tese investiga aqueles que são responsáveis pela perpetuação de obras de arte contemporâneas. Utilizando o termo “perpetuação” refere-se a uma preservação holística das componentes integrais (materiais e/ou imateriais) de uma obra de arte ao longo do tempo. Uma obra de arte contemporânea é reencenada de forma distinta em cada exposição: os materiais são substituídos, os formatos e equipamentos são alterados e as suas disposições espaciais vão variando. Uma obra pode começar como uma performance e ao longo dos anos evoluir para um objeto, ou vice-versa. Algumas alterações devem ser evitadas, outras devem ser acolhidas; cada obra de arte tem suas próprias regras, e há até casos em que essas regras devem ser alteradas ao longo do tempo. Tal como argumentou a socióloga Nathalie Heinich, a arte contemporânea constitui um novo paradigma de arte distinto do tradicional e do moderno. As obras de arte contemporâneas transgridem barreiras convencionais, são altamente idiossincráticas e têm uma disposição para abraçar a mudança. Assim, a identidade e a ontologia de uma obra contemporânea não são auto-evidentes, o que leva a que se deva exigir um trabalho de investigação e de documentação extenso e minucioso sobre as intenções do artista, bem como sobre a vida institucional da obra. Para os museus, esta exigência tem sido um desafio. Após a realização de uma revisão de literatura, de trabalho de campo e 27 entrevistas semiestruturadas com especialistas, esta tese procura investigar as formas pelas quais essa exigência afronta os papéis tradicionais dos museus, em particular as funções dos conservadores e curadores. Conclui-se que esta exigência imposta pelas obras de arte contemporâneas é difícil de ser cumprida, se for encarada como uma responsabilidade periférica e adicionada às muitas responsabilidades primárias que devem ser asseguradas por conservadores e curadores. A tese propõe que se institua um novo papel museológico: um colaborador de conservadores e curadores; um investigador que assuma as funções de compreender e documentar a identidade e a ontologia de uma obra contemporânea; alguém que faça um mapeamento sobre a intenção do artista, bem como sobre as razões que levam às decisões institucionais — a partir de uma reflexão clara, eficaz e bem documentada, desde o arquivo ao espaço expositivo.

Palavras-chave: arte contemporânea; cuidar de colecção; conservador; curador; intenção do artista; gestão de mudança

Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	1
Aim and context of research	1
Clarification of terms	3
Defining the contemporary art paradigm	5
Research questions	10
Methodology	10
Structure of thesis	12
<u>Chapter I. Prevailing theoretical discussions on an ethical management of change</u>	
Introduction	15
I. A shift of focus: from an object's state, to the artwork's identity	16
-Towards artist's intent	
-Issues of terminology: meaning-intent vs. intent about the work's constitutive properties	
II. Discourse on artist's intention in relation to artwork identity	19
-An early debate built around the concept of artist's intent: the landmark Cleaning Controversy of 1947-1963	
-Artist's intent in the contemporary art discourse: the 1997 conference "Modern Art: Who Cares?"	

III. Explorations of the artist's intent	26
-From the artist's intent to the artist's sanction	
-Evolving intentions?	
-The case of unfolding artworks	
-Concluding Remarks	
IV. A Challenge (I): From artwork's core identity to rupture	34
V. A Challenge (II): From custodians to co-creators of identity	37
-The challenge	
-Defending museum's investment in an artwork's core identity	
-Vindicating artist's sanction	
A summary	45

**Chapter II. Conservators and the challenge of contemporary art:
a varied approach**

Introduction	49
I. From the origins of conservation to the challenge of contemporary art: a <i>précis</i>	49
-Tracing the origins	
-Early theorisation and regulation of the practice	
-The traditional conservation paradigm and the challenges of contemporary art	
II. Tracing the shift in conservation practice: the paradigm of TBM conservation	53
-Collaboration with institutional colleagues	
-Professional networks and cross-institutional collaborations	
-Retraining	
-Reaching out	
-Turning to new theories	
-Concluding note: from TBM to contemporary art	

III. Conservators and the requirement for extended documentation	62
-The focusing points of documentation	
-Suitable documentation tools and methods: the artist's interview	
-Contemporary art documentation: whose responsibility?	

IV. The conservator's role in contemporary art perpetuation: noted tensions, noted shifts	70
-A certain uneasiness	
-A debated identity	
-Traced shifts	

V. Conservation training and the contemporary art paradigm	77
--	----

Chapter III. Perpetuation concerns and curatorial practice: a fragile dynamic

Introduction	83
I. The development of the role; from keeper to the contemporary art curator	84
-Early formations	
-Curator as creator	
-Contemporary art curator	
II. Curators in a contemporary art museum: responsibilities and status	89
-Many tasks	
-Position of power	
III. Curators and contemporary artwork's perpetuation	93
-Openness to improvisation and sense of autonomy	
-Varied attitudes towards documentation	
IV. Collaboration: a hierarchical order	101
-Curators' perception of roles	
-Perspectives on collaboration	

- Ultimate authority
- Hierarchies

V. Training	113
-------------	-----

Chapter IV. A case study: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum

Introduction	119
I. The set-up	119
II. The case of Untitled #336 by Fernando Calhau	124
III. The case of TV's Back (1995) by Alexandre Estrela	132
A summary	135
Images	136

Chapter V. Solution organised under an ideal role

Introduction	139
I. Repositioning the challenge	140
-Contemporary artworks require a new type of research for their perpetuation	
-The new type of research and regular stewardship roles within museums	
II. Solution organised under an ideal role	146
-The complications of treating the research/documentation task as a shared responsibility between many agents	
-From a shared peripheral responsibility for many agents, to a primary responsibility for a designated role in charge	

III. The role of the Research and Documentation Specialist	148
-Responsibilities involved	
-The profile and background of the professional appropriate for the role	
- Preliminary feedback on the idea of the role	
 A summary	 154
 <u>Thesis Summary</u>	 157
 <u>Reference List</u>	 165
 <u>List of Referenced Interviews</u>	 180
 <u>Appendices</u>	 183

Introduction

I. Aim and context of research

The aim of this thesis is to examine the challenge that conservators and curators face in the process of perpetuating contemporary artworks, and to delineate the range of responsibilities entailed in this complex mission.¹ The following passage chronicles the inception of the seminal Dutch project Conservation of Contemporary Art and attests to the importance of studying the two roles closer when trying to develop solutions for the complex mission of perpetuating contemporary artworks.

The Project *Conservation of Contemporary Art* was set up as a result of a discussion between the curator of sculpture of the Kröller-Müller Museum and a free-lance conservator. The discussion concerned the conservation of a work by Sol LeWitt, executed directly on a wall. The work was smeared with dirty finger-marks and it was discussed how it should be cleaned. The curator's view was that it could be newly constructed, as it was a work of conceptual art. The concept is the work in written form which can be executed by others. The fysical [sic] work executed on the wall is not the work itself, but only a representation of it. The conservator objected to this view on restoration and she felt it was not in line with present codes of restoration ethics. As other objects in the collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum also raised conservation problems for which there were no ready-made solutions, the curator asked fellow curators whether they too were faced with the same problems. This indeed proved to be the case.

In 1993 a working group was set up consisting of curators and conservators from a small number of museums of modern art. All could point to various relevant cases within their own museums. At the meetings there were lively, sometimes even fierce discussions concerning the dilemmas confronting curators and conservators when seeking ways to tackle the problem of decaying collections.²

¹ For the use of the term “perpetuation” see pages 3–4 of this thesis.

² Text available at: www.sbmkn.nl/en/projects/Modern_Art_Who_Cares [accessed 27 September 2019].

This passage chronicles the official founding of the contemporary art perpetuation discourse in the Netherlands — one of the countries which is leading the discourse internationally. Many debates, networks, research projects, organisations, conferences and publications originate from this single incident, where one curator and one conservator were confronted with a problem for which they could not reach consensus. The disclosed anecdote provides a slight indication of how contemporary artworks complicate curators' and conservators' jurisdictions, and how they put strain on their established methodologies and the ways in which they collaborate.

The institutional challenges of instantiating, perpetuating and collecting contemporary art started being systematically addressed in the late 70s. In 1977, the *Restoration of Modern Art Symposium* took place in Dusseldorf, Germany,³ and addressed many of the subjects that occupy the discourse to this day.⁴ In July 1980, the *International Symposium on the Conservation of Contemporary Art* took place in Ottawa, Canada; and, in April 1984 the Conference *Conservation and Contemporary Art* was organised in Sydney, Australia. However, it was not until the 1990s that contemporary art conservation formalised into a distinct and sustained discourse. It was at this time that various initiatives and specialised professional bodies were established,⁵ providing support to the production and dissemination of relevant research. The development of the discourse, and of the field, is marked through a series of very important conferences and their hugely valuable resulting publications. In September 1995, Tate Gallery (London, UK) organised the conference *From Marble to Chocolate*. In September 1997, SBMK concluded its pioneering *Conservation of Modern Art Project* with the seminal symposium *Modern Art: Who Cares?* In March 1998, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) organised at the Getty Center (Los Angeles, USA) the conference *Mortality/Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art*. Following these landmark events, numerous conferences and new institutional initiatives have been devoted to the subject.⁶

³ Restaurierung Moderner Kunst: Das Düsseldorfer Symposium.

⁴ The topics discussed in the symposium were: "Dangers and deterioration of contemporary art. Examples of restoration problems. Maintenance of paintings by the artist. Problems deriving from the use of perishable materials or from defective technique. Cooperation of scientists, artists, producers of painting materials, restorers and historians. Training of conservators. Documentation and information", see www.bcin.ca/bcin/detail.app?id=280 [accessed 17 September 2019].

⁵ The establishment of the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art in the Netherlands (later renamed as Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (SBMK)) took place in 1995. The Guggenheim Museum Variable Media Initiative emerged in 1999 (soon after developed to Variable Media Network (VMN)). The International Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) was established in 1999.

⁶ For an overview of conferences and initiatives, since 2000, see Marçal 2019.

The contemporary art perpetuation research and discourse is multifaceted and has been developing in various fronts: confronting new technical and technological challenges; studying new and unconventional materials; addressing wider questions in relation to artwork's ontology, materiality and authorship; and, reflecting on professional roles and their responsibilities. This thesis is part of an international project devoted to such research: the EU funded Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network *New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* (NACCA). NACCA aims to produce new knowledge in relation to matters of authenticity, materiality and ethics; to investigate new methodologies for the creation and distribution of knowledge; and to explore the function of the various institutional structures and of the relevant professional roles.

II. Clarification of terms

In analysing my approach with regard to the use of some key terms in this thesis, I would like to begin by discussing the use of the terms “conservation” and “perpetuation”. “Conservation” is used in the art discourse as a “passepartout” term, lumping together different practices and different missions, from the very specific to the very broad. “Conservation” is customarily used to refer to a professional discipline and an associated set of practices that focus on safeguarding the material integrity of artworks.⁷ However, the term “conservation” is also used to refer to a wider institutional mission, involving a diverse network of actors, and addressing both the material and the conceptual integrity of a work of art. Certain scholars have suggested the term “conservation as broadly defined” to describe this wider meaning; referring to “a social process, one that includes the work of many individuals and groups, not just conservation professionals” (Avrami et al. 2000, 3).⁸

As described above, the meaning of “conservation” has become broad, and difficult to define from both the prevailing literature and its varied usage by museum scholars. In this thesis, I use the term “conservation” to refer to the particular role and practice of professional conservators, as defined by the International Council of Museums - Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC).⁹ And, I make use of the term “perpetuation” (instead of “conservation as broadly defined”) when referring specifically to the holistic preservation of

⁷ See, for instance: Domínguez Rubio 2014, 626.

⁸ See, also: Muñoz Viñas 2005, 9–15 and Laurenson 2006, sentences 5–7.

⁹ www.icom-cc.org/330/about-icom-cc/what-is-conservation/conservation:-who,-what-amp;-why/#.WSW25sbaEhd [accessed 10 May 2019].

the integral components (material and/or immaterial) of an artwork over time.¹⁰ This meaning of "perpetuation" reflects the manner in which the term is used by social scientist Vivian Van Saaze in her 2013 book "Installation Art and the Museum".¹¹

The decision to mark a clear distinction between "perpetuation" and "conservation" — for instance, referring to "contemporary art perpetuation discourse" instead of "contemporary art conservation discourse"— addresses the concern that the use of the term "conservation" across its many different definitions can hinder a clear and in-depth communication of ideas (a fundamental prerequisite for a doctoral research). Furthermore, the use of the term "perpetuation" avoids an association to a specific professional discipline and to specific practices traditionally associated with this discipline — an association which could obscure, and/or hinder, the contribution of different disciplines and of diverse practices.

A clarification of terminology is also needed for my use of the terms "conservator" and "curator". A common confusion arises due to the different usages of the term "conservator" in the English-speaking world, and that of the Romance/Germanic languages.¹² In the English paradigm, the term "conservator" refers to the museum professional who has studied conservation-restoration and part of their role is to perform the related assessment of an artwork as well as the corresponding treatment, whilst the term "curator" refers to the museum professional that has as one of their primary roles the curation of exhibitions. In contrast, the Romance/Germanic paradigm employs the term "conservateur" or "konservator" to refer to the role of a curator — traditionally positioned as the keeper or custodian of a collection. This matter is further complicated by conducting part of my research in Portugal, a country transitioning from the Romance/Germanic to the English paradigm. Even within certain Portuguese institutions, the transition is incomplete and the terms "conservator" and "curator" can be used interchangeably to refer to the same individual who has the role of a curator,¹³ while the terms "restorer" and "conservator" can be used interchangeably to refer to the same individual who has the role of a conservator.¹⁴

¹⁰ The verb "to perpetuate" is defined as "to cause something to last indefinitely" (Allen 2004, 1036). It is important to note that, in the way the term is used in this thesis, "something" refers to the artwork and not necessarily its instance. For an exploration of the distinction between an artwork and its instance (also theorised by different scholars as that between the work of art and its vehicle/manifestation/spatiotemporal event/physical embodiment/vehicular medium) see Chapter I (pages 39–40).

¹¹ See Van Saaze 2013, for instance the pages: 15, 97, 114, 132 and 185.

¹² See: ICOM-CC 1981, 4 and Pye 2001, 26.

¹³ See, for instance, the case of Nuno Vassallo e Silva in Calouste Gulbenkian Museum (CGM) who had all his training in Art History and is presented by CGM interchangeably as "conservador" and "curador". <https://gulbenkian.pt/historia-das-exposicoes/entities/2615/> [accessed 10 November 2021].

¹⁴ In other words, when someone is introduced as a conservator, it is unclear whether the person is a curator or a professional trained in conservation-restoration.

Although this research was conducted as part of a Portuguese university, to avoid confusion, in this text (as in the quoted passage that opens this thesis), both the terms “curator” and “conservator” are used following the English language paradigm, while the term “restorer” is used to refer only to practitioners of the period before the 1930s — the 30s being acknowledged as a key moment when conservation started to become institutionally defined as a distinct practice and specific professional activity (as will be further discussed later).

The next term to clarify is that of “contemporary art”, which is used in literature in various ways: at times referring to a chronological category, and at other times used interchangeably with “modern art”. This research adopts the position of sociologist Nathalie Heinich, using the term not as a chronological categorisation but as a term signifying a particular paradigm of art which is distinct from both traditional and modern art.¹⁵ Different scholars frame this particular paradigm of artworks by using the descriptive adjectives: contingent, variable, and performative. I have decided to address the paradigm with the general term “contemporary art”, as this is also the approach of NACCA. In the next section, I will analyse the three interrelated characteristics that have been identified as distinguishing contemporary artworks from those of other paradigms: transgression, idiosyncrasy and a disposition in embracing change.

III. Defining the contemporary art paradigm: transgression, idiosyncrasy, and embracing change

In defining the contemporary art paradigm, I will mainly focus on theories developed by Nathalie Heinich and those put forward by art historian Martha Buskirk. Heinich has framed contemporary artworks as transgressing established norms, while, Buskirk has positioned them as idiosyncratic and contingent. I understand their theories as complimenting each other, providing a comprehensive view of what constitutes contemporary art.

Transgression

For Nathalie Heinich, the characteristic that defines the paradigm of contemporary art is the artwork’s transgression of all conventional frames: temporal, spatial, relational, ontological, as

¹⁵ See: Heinich 2015.

well as those concerning materiality (Heinich 2015). In what follows, I will briefly elaborate on the different types of transgression.¹⁶ A contemporary artwork can transgress:

- Temporal norms. Moving beyond the temporally static, the contemporary artwork embraces the opportunity to evolve (from one instantiation to another or during display), and draws the audience's attention to this evolution.
- Its orthodox relationship with the exhibition space. Being no longer passively sited within the space, the contemporary artwork can be found claiming control over the space and integrating it as one of its intrinsic elements.
- Standard ways of relating. Challenging its own autonomy, the contemporary artwork creates different kinds of relationships both with the audience and/or its caretakers. For instance, by requiring them to become a part of it.
- The ontological precedents of visual arts. The contemporary artwork challenges the model of the self-contained artefact in multiple and intriguing ways. For instance, in artworks that although they are introduced as aesthetically composed artefacts, their ontology is that of an event.
- The conventional frame of a fixed materiality. The same artwork being instantiated with different materials across different installations.

Furthermore, it is necessary to clarify that certain contemporary artworks transgress norms in more than one of the five specified areas, and sometimes all five simultaneously — “*Untitled*” (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*) (1991) by Félix González-Torres can be suggested as a case of the latter.¹⁷

Idiosyncrasy

The contemporary artwork, being variably transgressive, is correspondingly idiosyncratic. Martha Buskirk has referred to this characteristic as “the extreme heterogeneity of contemporary art” (Buskirk 2003, 129). The way one contemporary artwork transgresses conventional frames is completely different from the way another contemporary artwork does. Therefore, the task of categorising a contemporary artwork inevitably leads to ambiguous and

¹⁶ For examples of artworks with regard to the different types of transgression see Appendix I (page 183).

¹⁷ For “*Untitled*” (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*) (1991), the artist Félix González-Torres specified that 175 lbs of candies individually wrapped in multicolour cellophane are placed in a pile on the exhibition floor and the audience is allowed to pick one up and consume it.

conflicting results. This is due to the fact that the transgression that defines contemporary art does not only take place *within* the singular artwork, but also *between* different contemporary artworks. In other words, because each contemporary artwork employs space, time, materiality and the audience's experience in a distinct way, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that contemporary artworks are not defined by their unity, but by the ways in which they *defy* unity.

The idiosyncratic character of contemporary artworks greatly affects the museum's perpetuation processes. Since every contemporary artwork constitutes a unique case in the ways it is to be instantiated over time, stewards cannot have the option of relying on shared conventions in order to make decisions for its perpetuation. The materials used in instantiating a contemporary artwork have different statuses and functions with regard to those artworks. These materials may all be used in instantiating works of art, however, in each case, they may call for a completely different management and treatment. As remarked by conservation scholar Glenn Wharton: polishing or refinishing might be a justifiable conservation treatment for a scratched surface of a sculpture by Donald Judd, however, the same does not apply for the case of a scratched Carl Andre floor plate (Wharton 2005, 174).

Furthermore, different artworks by the same artist can require a completely different approach for their perpetuation. As Martha Buskirk has noted, artworks by the same artist may have "widely varying requirements when it comes to arrangement, placement, or the substitution of elements" (Buskirk 2003, 56). A well-known case is discussed in the paper "Impossible Liberties" by curator Kimberley Davenport, and concerns artist Sol LeWitt and his artwork *Standing Open Structure, Black* (1964): a free-standing rectangular structure made in painted wood. As revealed by Davenport, the museum that was housing the work on a long-term loan had contacted LeWitt (when still the owner of the artwork) to ask for his permission to fabricate a copy of it, in order to be loaned for exhibitions overseas. The museum wanted to avoid transporting the original to European venues for exhibition and, at the same time, preferred to keep the original as part of their permanent display. It was thus convenient for them to assume that the artist could validate a decision to treat the work as reproducible, in the same manner as with his famous *Wall Drawings*. Sol LeWitt declined, posing back the question "[w]ould you repaint a Mondrian?" and thus stressing that *Standing Open Structure, Black*, being a specific object, could neither be at two places at the same time, nor reproducible.

I want to point out that when LeWitt referred to Mondrian's work while discussing the treatment of his own artwork, he was not suggesting that his artwork needed to be understood, or treated as something other than conceptual art — actually, it is a fact that LeWitt was working on his *Open Structure* artworks when he published the essay "Paragraphs on

Conceptual Art” in 1967.¹⁸ I suggest that, with his reference, LeWitt points to the way in which conceptual art complicates the very function of conventions.¹⁹ LeWitt has stated that “in conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work.” However, he has also added that “the concept of a work of art may involve the matter of the piece or the process in which it is made.” If we consider these two statements in conjunction with his reaction to the proposal of reproducing *Standing Open Structure, Black*, it becomes clear that LeWitt’s art stance was neither questioning the importance of how an artwork is materially constituted, nor was he aiming to contest the very value of the concept of the Unique. Instead, I would claim that LeWitt was pointing to an artwork’s uniqueness that extends beyond the level of molecules; a uniqueness that pertains to the complex idiosyncrasy of the individual artwork. A complex idiosyncrasy which becomes a defining characteristic in the case of contemporary artworks.

Embracing change

The third characteristic of contemporary artworks concerns their disposition toward embracing change. The contemporary artwork has been discussed as dematerialised, variable, contingent changing and changeable.²⁰ All these adjectives referring, one way or another, to the multiple forms a contemporary artwork might take between different instantiations, while still remaining the said artwork.

The contemporary artwork, by no longer complying to the model of the self-contained artefact, can be found open to change and diverse instantiations. Artworks embrace change by addressing the spaces they inhabit and by adjusting to them, as for instance in the case of *All shadows that occurred to me in... are marked with tape* (1969) by Jan Dibbets: an instruction artwork that, as the title makes explicit, requires from a designated person to mark with tape the shadows that occur to them in the space where the work is instantiated. Artworks embrace change by inviting the active involvement of audiences. For instance, in the case of *Mass Media – Today and Yesterday* (1972) by Gustav Metzger: the audience is invited to contribute to a collective collage of specified topics, by finding and cutting out related clippings from thousands of different newspapers stacked together in the middle of the exhibition room.

¹⁸ See: Harrison and Wood 2003, 846.

¹⁹ In his 1968 “Sentences on Conceptual” LeWitt had indeed explicitly stated that “the conventions of art are altered by works of art” (LeWitt 2003 [1968], 850).

²⁰ For reference to these discussions, see respectively: Lippard 1997; Ippolito 1998; Buskirk 2003; Van Saaze 2013; and, Hölling 2013.

Artworks embrace change by incorporating perishable and/or replaceable materials, as for instance in *Compound* (1965) by Carl Andre: a work incorporating a structure consisting of 12 nine-foot-long, industrially produced, standard size, and commercially available Styrofoam units. While in the work's first presentation the Styrofoam units were white in colour, when the artist presented the work again in 1991 the Styrofoam units were orange in colour and two out of the three dimensions of the individual units were different.²¹

"Unfolding artworks" form a completely different category with regard to the ways in which contemporary artworks embrace change. Conservation scholar Pip Laurenson has described this category as relating to "works with more adaptive DNA, including within them instructions for growth and development" (Laurenson 2016).²² In the case of an unfolding artwork, each instantiation requires the generative engagement of the artist who addresses the context of the new display and produces additional content for the work.²³

In all the categories presented above, artists utilise the element of change as a creative component, and the variation between instantiations is inherent to the work's concept. However, beyond this type of change that has a creative source, it is important to note that by escaping the model of the self-contained artefact contemporary artworks become susceptible to changes that are not part of the artwork's concept. These changes can include those that are due to: pragmatic constraints (for instance spatial limitations or unavailability of certain materials/elements that can be part of the artwork and in need of replacement); adjustments from the artist in the process of testing and optimising details when an artwork is still young²⁴; remedial acts (for instance in cases of artworks that incorporate technologies that become obsolete and require migration²⁵); the artist changing their minds about certain features of the artwork overtime; or, even, institutional interference.

Change that is non-inherent to an artwork varies considerably, and not all changes have the same impact to the work. Thus, not all changes can be approached as requiring the same type of management. For a given contemporary artwork, there could be: change that stewards need to foster, change they need to control (or even prevent), change they need to revert, or change for which they must compensate in some other way. This situation brings about a very

²¹ Although the Styrofoam units used in 1991 were, still, nine-foot-long, their other two dimensions were 9'' x 21'' and not 7'' x 20'' (which was the case in 1965).

²² Reference at 43:20.

²³ For a detailed description of an unfolding artwork see Appendix II (page 185).

²⁴ Joanna Phillips has observed that for time-based media artworks "a number of different iterations are often needed to explore and define the variability of the piece in reaction to different spaces, devices or technologies", and uses the term "young artwork" to refer to works that haven't gone through this process (Phillips 2012, 152).

²⁵ "Migration" refers to the process of "upgrading the technology to a more contemporary standard" (Van Saaze 2013, 69).

important task for stewards: to distinguish between the different types of change; to acknowledge whether they impact the artwork (and, if so, how?); and to devise a change-management plan.

IV. Research Questions

As discussed previously, the aim of this thesis is to examine the challenge that conservators and curators face in the process of perpetuating contemporary artworks and to delineate the range of responsibilities entailed in this complex mission. In order to achieve that aim, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) Do contemporary artworks require a unique type of institutional care for their perpetuation and, if so, why?
- 2) What role do existing museum caretakers (i.e., conservators and curators) have in the process of perpetuating contemporary artworks, and what are the challenges they face?
- 3) What are the responsibilities and processes that such challenges make pertinent?
- 4) And, what are the characteristics of a role that can successfully undertake these responsibilities?

V. Methodology

The practice of art stewardship is understood as subjected to philosophical principles. Accordingly, this doctoral research on contemporary art stewardship lies at the crossroads where practice meets theory, and theory meets practice.

The starting point for this research is an analysis of the prevailing theories for contemporary art stewardship. The aim of this analysis is to highlight the appropriate guiding principles for the management of change in contemporary artworks. These principles form the theoretical framework for institutional practice and, at the same time, the theoretical framework for this research and its analysis of the responsibilities and roles of contemporary art stewards. Theories of authenticity and artist's intent become subject to a comparative analysis. Relevant texts by philosophers are considered alongside key theoretical contributions of practitioners (conservators, curators and artists) and actual case studies discussed in literature. By studying and analysing theory and practice side-by-side, the research aims to explore and address the

museum practice dictated by different philosophical theories and, at the same time, the philosophical implication of particular museum practices. In this way the research aims to examine possible gaps between theory and practice and to explore ways to bridge them.

The heritage community discusses the perpetuation of contemporary artworks as a shared responsibility between conservators and curators. However, there is a lack of detailed accounts on how perpetuation decisions are actually made and on the specific roles of different museum professionals.²⁶ Case studies in the literature provide limited information on how the sharing of responsibility is materialised in practice; on who has the final word in decision-making; and on whether there is a line that clearly demarcates the areas of research, expertise and thus jurisdiction of the different professionals.

The methodology of this research prioritises primary sources of evidence, and thus incorporates 27 semi-structured expert interviews I conducted with conservators and curators; all of whom work with contemporary artworks. The interviewees discuss how they understand their roles and those of their institutional colleagues and provide details on how decisions are made during collaboration.

I have also utilised ethnographic methods of enquiry for the purposes of gaining first-hand access to institutional decision-making. The decision to undertake direct observation through fieldwork was based on three considerations. First, I believe in the value of triangulation: studying a research area with multiple research tools and from different perspectives. Second, I recognise the significant contribution ethnographic research has had in the last two decades in revealing the inner workings of contemporary art museums.²⁷ And third, due to the complexity of perpetuating contemporary artworks,²⁸ I believe that experiencing the decision-making process provides an opportunity to better understand the intricacies of the challenges and the dilemmas at stake.

The fieldwork took place at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum (CGM) in the form of a four-month secondment in the curatorial department. CGM was chosen as a representative case of the many museums across the world that incorporate contemporary artworks in their collections without being dedicated to contemporary art. I anticipated that this kind of museum

²⁶ Some accounts can be found at: Domínguez Rubio 2014; Wharton, 2016; and, Wielocha 2016.

²⁷ See: Yaneva 2003a, 2003b; Van Saaze 2009; and, Bunzl 2014.

²⁸ A simple, yet clear, testimony to this is that for artworks first instantiated in the 1960s the issues around their perpetuation started to be debated only in late 1970s, early 1980s –in the process of institutions preparing new instantiations. Furthermore, in literature, the vast majority of key publications and essays on the subject are written by museum professionals who describe the dilemmas as arising during the process of working with particular artworks for the purpose of an exhibition.

would have reduced access to specialised expertise and dedicated methodologies, making the challenge of perpetuating contemporary artworks all the more evident.

As a concluding remark, it is important to note that qualitative methods of research have been chosen in awareness of the fact that this research cannot be exhaustive. The aim of this research is not to map how the perpetuation of contemporary artworks is approached and carried out in every institution; this would be an impossible task. Instead, this research seeks to identify the challenges that institutions and professional stewards face in their processes of perpetuating contemporary artworks. Studying these challenges alongside what will be defended as the appropriate guiding principles for contemporary art stewardship, this research endeavours to expose the responsibilities contemporary art stewards face and how they shape the appropriate museum roles.

VI. Structure of thesis

In Chapter I, I examine the prevailing theoretical discussions around the ethical management of change. This illuminates the appropriate guiding principles for contemporary art stewardship. I start by discussing how perpetuation practices have shifted focus from an object's state to the artwork's identity, and I look into the discourse on "artist's intent" from multiple angles. I continue by exploring the key developments in the perpetuation discourse within the last two decades, which argues that the aim of contemporary artworks' stewardship is the identification and maintenance of an artwork's constitutive properties. I then explore the pragmatics and theoretical implication of such an undertaking. I close Chapter I by presenting and responding to the challenges that have been mounted against this position in the literature.

In the following two chapters, I proceed with an investigation on the roles of conservators and curators. In Chapter II, I look at the conservation profession and how it responds to the challenge of contemporary art. I begin with a brief historical overview of the field, up to the advent of contemporary art. Following, I explore the ways in which the paradigm of contemporary art has challenged and reformed the practices of museum conservators, and I discuss the internal tensions that accompanied such reform. I continue by presenting the shift in the role of a conservator, which has been brought about by the challenge of contemporary artworks. I close Chapter II by examining some voiced concerns regarding the suitability of standard conservation training to the requirements of responsible contemporary art stewardship.

In Chapter III, I explore the role of the curator with regard to the challenge of perpetuation of contemporary artworks. I begin with a brief historical overview of the curator's profession and I continue by considering the curator's role in a contemporary art museum. I elaborate on the wide range of activities curators are involved with and the powerful status curators have within the museum structure. Further, I examine the diverse ways in which curators perceive the task of contemporary art perpetuation and the diverse ways in which they tend to confront it. I go on to explore how curators conceive of their own role and that of conservators; how curators collaborate with conservators; and, I trace the process of decision-making, highlighting the role of hierarchies within that process. I close Chapter III with an examination of currently available curatorial training, which can also help in understanding the mindset with which museum curators enter the profession.

In Chapter IV, I present my observations from my first-person experience working as part of the CGM team in the process of installing an exhibition of contemporary artworks. I concentrate on two case studies: the artwork *Untitled #336* by Fernando Calhau and the artwork *TV's Back* (1995) by Alexandre Estrela. Having established (in Chapter I) that the aim of contemporary artworks' stewardship is the identification and maintenance of an artwork's constitutive properties, in this Chapter, I discuss the CGM's approach to documentation with regard to the two artworks in question. The Chapter explores how the process of perpetuating a contemporary artwork can evolve when there is no one directly in charge of documentation.

In the concluding Chapter V, I explore a way in which collecting institutions can move forward in confronting the challenges that contemporary artworks pose with regard to perpetuation. I begin by addressing what the previous chapters have revealed: that the biggest challenge facing the perpetuation of contemporary artworks (across media) concerns the research and documentation of the artwork's identity and ontology. I continue by discussing why it proves ineffective to add the responsibility of research and documentation to one of the existing museum roles. Further, I explore the idea of museums assigning a designated role to lead the mission of researching and documenting the contemporary artworks in their collection. I close Chapter V, and the thesis, by outlining the ideal role; analysing the responsibilities it would carry, and discussing the profile of the professional that would undertake it.

Chapter I.

Prevailing theoretical discussions on an ethical management of change

In the complex landscape of contemporary art, where change is diverse and omnipresent —as described in the Introduction— the balance between change and perpetuation is extremely delicate. During the last three decades, various scholars have been exploring different theories as potential tools that can support stewards in managing and protecting this balance from breaking. In understanding professional museum roles and the challenges they face with regard to perpetuating contemporary artworks, it is important to begin by exploring the theoretical discussions that have framed institutional practice. Meaning, authenticity, artist's intent, artist's sanction, identity, critical mass, are some of the operative concepts in the relevant discourse: in exploring these different concepts, scholars, ultimately, address, from different angles, the same two interlinked questions: with regard to a contemporary artwork, what does the heritage community need to safeguard and how?

It needs to be noted from the outset that the examination of the discourse cannot, by any means, be exhaustive within the bounds of a thesis: I will rather focus on selected areas, which I understand as being most pertinent to a research on the responsibilities and roles of contemporary art stewards. In §I, I examine a shift of focus for perpetuation practices from an object's state to the artwork's identity and I consider issues of terminology concerning the term "artist's intent". In §II, I explore the discourse on artist's intent with regard to the *Cleaning Controversy* and then, specifically, with regard to contemporary art and the landmark project *Modern Art Who Cares?* (henceforth, *MAWC*). In §III, I explore the main developments in the perpetuation discourse within the last fifteen years, putting forward as the aim of contemporary artworks' stewardship the identification and maintenance of an artwork's constitutive properties and exploring the pragmatics and theoretical implication of such an endeavour. In §IV and §V, I will face the challenges that have been mounted against this position in the existing scholarship.

I. A shift of focus: from an object's state, to the artwork's identity

Towards artist's intent

The subject of change has always been at the centre of heritage and conservation discourse. In the case of the traditional conservation paradigm, which prioritised keeping objects physically intact, change was understood in negative terms, ideally, having to be prevented or concealed.²⁹ However, as the priorities of perpetuation are being redefined, the stance on change seems to shift in parallel. For instance, when, in the 1980s, the traditional paradigm in conservation theory was challenged by a shift of focus from physicality to cultural significance,³⁰ both scholars and practitioners became, gradually, increasingly acceptive of an artwork's physical change, repositioning the steward's role from that of preventing change to "managing change".³¹

With regard to contemporary artworks, which are often intentionally open to change in multiple manners,³² the need to rethink methodologies which *de facto* privilege a work's original hard matter became particularly pressing. In 1999 curator D.H. van Wegen warned that a restricted focus on preserving the artwork as material object can, in cases, deprive an entity of its status as art:

Where only the maintenance of an art work as a material object is considered, this will be at a substantial cost to the expressive force of much contemporary art. In extreme cases nothing more will remain of the art work rather than 'archaeological' documentation, which simply provides information about its earlier existence as an art work.³³ (Van Wegen 2005 [1999], 205)

²⁹ See, for instance, the 1981 ICOM definition of preservation as an "action taken to retard or prevent deterioration of or damage to cultural properties by control of their environment and/or treatment of their structure in order to maintain them as nearly as possible in an unchanging state". In ICOM – CC, *The Conservator Restorer: A Definition of the Profession*. Paris 1981, Sec. 2.1. See: www.icom-cc.org/47/about/definition-of-profession-1984/ [accessed 20 June 2020].

³⁰ "Cultural significance" is the term used by the conservation community "to encapsulate the multiple values ascribed to objects, buildings, or landscapes" (Avrami et al. 2000, 7). And, based on Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013: "[c]ultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations." (Australia ICOMOS 2013a, article 1.2.). See also: Australia ICOMOS 2013b.

³¹ See, for instance: Albano 1996 [1988]; Pullen 2005 [1999]; Teutonico and Matero 2003; GCI 2009.

³² See: pages 8–9 of this thesis.

³³ A further note on the contemporary artwork's idiosyncratic nature: while Van Wegen proceeds with this comment, at the same time, he is careful to exclude two kinds of cases. Firstly, contemporary artworks which intentionally employ material elements invested with a fetish-type value; in particular, Van Wegen refers to the installation *Eigentum Himmelreich* (Heaven's Property) by artist IMI Knoebel, which incorporates two ladders

On similar grounds, conservators Laura Davies and Jackie Heuman, presenting their experience of instantiating particular contemporary artworks,³⁴ in their essay “Meaning Matters: Collaborating with Contemporary Artists,” describe the ways in which they were required to support artworks’ being materially reshaped from instantiation to instantiation, and from concept to realisation, in order to respect the artworks’ “conceptual importance” (Davies and Heuman 2004). This type of essay is not uncommon: since the late 1990’s, a plethora of essays communicate dilemmas and difficulties with regard to particular cases, exploring new ways to theoretically explain and justify the rationale of the kind of decision-making that embraces artwork’s change. Ultimately, in these essays, scholars are looking for a new area of focus for conservation activities. A central question reverberates: when the imperative to preserve an artwork’s material make-up is deemed relative, what is the new area of focus that can guide a legitimate management of change?

In responding to this question, a number of scholars pointed towards the artwork’s *actually intended meaning* (extracted directly from the artist) as both an area of focus for preservation efforts and the source of information that can support accurate decision-making.³⁵ Conservator IJsbrand Hummelen and art historian Tatja Scholte, identify as the challenge for the care of contemporary artworks the fact that:

[M]eaning is not only mediated by the material and technical aspects of a physical object, or by the use of a particular medium. Non-tangible qualities evoke meaning as well, for example in the interaction between several physical objects (as in installation art), or in the execution of a conceptual work, in the movement of a kinetic work, or in the experience of a performance or live event. (Hummelen and Scholte 2004, 208)

Arguing that “[t]he role of conservators and curators of contemporary art is to document the rationale behind the relationships and idiosyncratic meanings in installations by an engaged communication with the artist”, Hummelen and Scholte indicate in their essay that, in order to be in a position to document and safeguard the meaning of the work effectively, there is a need

from the studio of late artist Rainer Giese (Van Wegen 2005 [1999], 204). Secondly, cases where relics from a performance acquire fetish significance, as they “symbolically represent the artistic act” (ibid., 205).

³⁴ The artworks: *As if to Celebrate, I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* (1981) and *A Wing at the Heart of Things* (1990) by Anish Kapoor, *Untitled (Rooms)* (2001) by Rachel Whiteread and *Now the Day is Over* (2002) by Anya Gallacio.

³⁵ See: “The decision-making model for the conservation and restoration of modern and contemporary art” (Hummelen and Sillé 2005 [1999], 164–172).

to develop “useful strategies for the documentation of working processes and artistic intent” (ibid.).

The concept of the *artist’s intent* (referred to, also, as artistic intent and as artist’s intention) has kept a central position in the art’s perpetuation discourse for almost three quarters of a century. Although its utility in the discourse has, at times, been questioned, it is still a very widely used concept and many important art perpetuation debates revolve around it. With regard to contemporary art, it is probably the most prominent concept in discussions about perpetuation strategies: it is thus merited that we follow the developments in the discourse under the lens of this concept, examining, first, issues of terminology.

Issues of terminology: meaning-intent vs. intent about the work’s constitutive properties

Social scientist Vivian Van Saaze has noted that there is a lack of “conceptual clarity and consistency” in the ways in which the term *artist’s intent* is used in the conservation discourse (Van Saaze 2013, 53). The lack of conceptual clarity and consistency can be seen to underlie the conflicting attitudes evidenced in the discourse with regard to the relevance of artist’s intent for perpetuation practices. The relevant debates draw on, and mirror, the well-known debate over artist’s intent in the domain of literary criticism, triggered by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s 1946 essay “The intentional fallacy”. The debate between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists in literary criticism concerns whether the artist’s intent, expressed outside the fabric of the artwork, should be considered by critics and audiences *as a legitimate point of reference in determining the artwork’s meaning*. Conservation scholars have been discussing the anti-intentionalist view in literary criticism *as equivalent* to a positivist approach in conservation, where guidance for conservation decision-making can only come from analysis of the material constitution of the artwork.³⁶ However, the intentional fallacy argument, properly understood, does not seem to have any bearing on this matter: this argument, as developed, does not concern either the significance of artist’s intent with regard to the work’s constitutive properties or whether the artist has the authority to determine how his or her work is to be instantiated over time. An anti-intentionalist, such as Beardsley, argues that the art object is the only proper source of information in relation, *specifically*, to an artwork’s interpretation and evaluation: it does not logically follow from this position —and

³⁶ See: Dykstra 1999, 204; and, Wharton 2015, 3.

anti-intentionalists in literary criticism nowhere argue— that decisions about the artwork’s perpetuation should also be grounded solely on the art object.³⁷

What we need to acknowledge is that, as there are indeed many meanings associated with the term “artist’s intent,” there are many types of intent that can be squeezed under the term.³⁸ Therefore, there is a need to distinguish between an artist’s intent regarding the work’s constitutive properties (in other words, an artist’s intent regarding the work’s identity), and an artist’s *meaning*-intent — which is the target of anti-intentionalism in the domain of literary criticism. This distinction between the two different types of artists’ intentions has been highlighted by Stephen Davies (2016); as Davies notes, “[i]ntentions that are relevant to fixing the work’s identity are one thing, while intentions about what meanings belong to the work, beyond the plain ones it wears, are another” (Davies 2016 [2006], 111). Proceeding from this important conceptual distinction, Davies states that he is an intentionalist regarding the significance of the artist’s intentions in determining the artwork’s identity and ontology, although he is not an intentionalist with regard to interpretation — thus rejecting the idea that the artist’s intentions determine what constitutes a legitimate reading of the artwork (Davies 2007, 15–6).

Although this conceptual distinction does not seem to be popular in the conservation discourse,³⁹ it is, I find, fundamental for an effective debate over the principles and practices of art perpetuation. By differentiating between an artist’s meaning-intent and an artist’s intent in relation to the work’s identity, we will avoid misleading reductions and will be able to conduct and communicate our research on artworks with more clarity and consistency.

II. Discourse on artist’s intention in relation to artwork identity

An early debate built around the concept of artist’s intent: the landmark Cleaning Controversy of 1947–1963

To examine the ways in which conservation scholars have been addressing artistic intent specifically with regard to the aim of tracing an artwork’s identity, it is merited that we depart

³⁷ Wimsatt and Beardsley stated, in particular, that “the intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (1962 [1946], 92).

³⁸ See, for instance, the 1996 essay “Artist’s intentions and the intentional fallacy in fine arts conservation” by conservator Steve Dykstra, where different types of artist’s intent become exposed in the process of exploring the various different meanings associated with the term (Dykstra 1996).

³⁹ For instance, Vivian Van Saaze’s has remarked: “in conservation literature ‘artist’s intent’ often coincides with ‘what the artist means with the work’ and becomes a facet of interpretation” (Van Saaze 2013, 54).

from the early discourse on the subject—in particular, the *Cleaning Controversy* of 1947–1963—highlighted by conservator Steven Dykstra as a key moment that brought the concept of artist’s intent to the centre of the conservation discourse.⁴⁰

In the period between 1936 and 1946 the National Gallery in London proceeded with a radical cleaning of a large number of old masters’ paintings in its collection, giving rise to a fierce and long-lasting debate that, in its core, concerned conservation’s research methodologies and the quest for the artist’s intent. Supporters of the cleaning intervention argued that “it is presumed beyond dispute that the aim of those entrusted with the care of paintings is to present them as nearly as possible in the state in which the artist intended them to be seen” (McLaren and Werner 1950, 189).⁴¹ And as the actual facts prove, from their perspective this meant relying solely to analytical methodologies of hard sciences and cleaning a painted surface to the level of stripping it from any layer that is not paint in full impasto. In other words, they defended the view that an artist’s intent can be identified through a microscope and the appropriate intervention has the aim to make intent visible to the bare eye. Their opponents criticised the National Gallery’s methodologies by pointing to the complexity of the task of identifying and preserving an artist’s intent, however, without questioning the value of the task itself. For instance, art historian Ernst Gombrich commented that “the question of what paintings looked like when they were made is more easily asked than answered” and made reference to darkening glazes and varnishes and the possibility of them being original to the paintings (Gombrich 1996 [1960], 123–4). Similarly, art historian Cesare Brandi criticised the removal of patina by arguing that “what we call patina can more often than not be shown to consist either of glazes or of tinted varnishes” (Brandi 1996 [1949], 382), and used both historical testimonies and analysis of selected paintings to argue that the application of glazes and coloured varnishes was, in many cases, a common practice for old masters. Brandi concluded that:

Even in those cases where the absence of old varnishes and glazes can be proved,
it is always possible that these were removed in earlier restorations; and it must be

⁴⁰ For earlier use of the concept, going back to the mid-19th century, see: conservation theorist Salvador Muñoz Viñas (2005), who discusses classical conservation theories that position the artist’s intent as one of the four factors weighing in the integrity of the object (the other three factors being: the object’s material components, its perceivable features, and its original function) (Muñoz Viñas 2005, 66–7).

⁴¹ At the time when the quoted article was published, both authors were National Gallery employees: art historian Neil McLaren had the position of Assistant Keeper, while chemist and conservation scientist Anthony Werner had the position of Research Chemist.

borne in mind that we may often find ourselves in closer touch with the mind of the artist by leaving the picture with its patina than by removing it. (ibid., 391)

From this brief reference to the *Cleaning Controversy*, it becomes clear that, with regard to old masters' paintings, the debating scholars (regardless of their position in the argument) were mostly approaching artist's intent as consisting in the *artist's actual decisions and actions that have been obscured by time*. However, as we will see below, extended research on the subject has revealed that it is not only time that can obscure the artist's intent: the artist's intent *can be variously ambiguous in itself*.

Artist's intent in the contemporary art discourse: the 1997 conference "Modern Art: Who Cares?"

In the case of contemporary artworks —where stewards, normally, can have direct access to the artist,— the discourse about the artist's intent takes different directions and the actual research of an artist's intent becomes very complex. To explore this vast area of discourse, research and practice, I will begin by focusing on the landmark undertaking of SBMK that began in 1993 with the 'Conservation of Modern Art' project and resulted in the 1997 conference MAWC and the homonymous seminal publication of 1999.

The project involved systematic, interdisciplinary research of ten contemporary artworks in need of care, selected to act as pilot case studies, from which to deduce general guidelines for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks. Four of the ten artists (Woody Van Amen, Tony Cragg, Krijn Giezen and Helk Peeters) were directly involved in the process.⁴² As art historian Tineke Reijnders remarks in her reflection of the project, its "guiding principle was to establish the untainted origins of the art work in question, [...] the personification of the origin is the author" and "the artist was consulted whenever possible" (Reijnders 2005 [1999], 151–2). The published reports of the research provide an insight into the collaborations: the artists described in detail their artistic processes and the rationale of their decision-making, while, in each individual case, working group and artist examined together the artwork's condition and had extended conversations about the possible treatments and their practical, aesthetic and ethical implications. In order to draw a clear picture of the project's approach to

⁴² Four of the artworks in the project were by artists that were no longer alive (Marcel Broodthaers, Piero Manzoni, Pino Pascali, and Jean Tinguely), while the research of the artworks by Piero Gilardi and Mario Merz was conducted without the direct involvement of the artists.

the artist's intent (i.e., what was understood as artist's intent and how intent was used in decision-making), it is useful to take a closer look at two specific cases.

The artwork *De Overwintering op Nova Zembla* (1968–69) by Woody van Amen is a sculpture that consists of a two-metre-high metal box attached to two Perspex containers filled with hay, as well as an imitation of a domestic open-hearth fire, an exposed refrigeration unit and several neon tubes (all electrical elements intended to be in functioning mode). The sculpture was in need of treatment: not all the electric apparatus was in working order, there was discoloration, some elements were damaged or hanging loose, and the entire construction was soiled. In the report of the research, signed by conservator Madeleine Bisschoff, under the section on “artist's intention” we find what Van Amen specified as “the work's essence”: i.e., what variations he considered acceptable and under what conditions, and for which reasons an element of the sculpture would need to be replaced. We also find general statements about the work's overall appearance, as well as clear directives for treatment:

Van Amen stressed that the whole object should appear cared for. The disturbing black letters on the neon tubes should be removed; there should be no fingerprints on the stainless steel cladding; the drip tray must be clean and not dull. In short, the whole work should look in his words ‘spick-and-span’. In Van Amen's view, replacing components is a realistic option if no other method can be found to allow the elements to function properly. (Bisschoff 2005 [1999], 109)

As portrayed in the report, the collaboration with Van Amen proceeded with no conflict, the artist's intent was found to be in line with his artistic process and consistent throughout, and the artist was described as “supremely helpful and clear about his analysis” (ibid., 108). As the report explains, the artist's view “provided an ethical and aesthetic framework within which the discussion about the work developed and which finally led to a conservation proposal” (ibid.).

However, the collaboration of the working group with Krijn Giezen on his artwork *Marocco* (1972) developed differently. *Marocco* is an assemblage of twenty objects, arranged inside a shallow vitrine, consisting of a wooden box covered by a sheet of glass; among the objects there are animal parts, dried plants, tools, a piece of fabric and sheets of paper. When the working group contacted Giezen, the vitrine was infested with insects and the organic matter was in a state of decomposition. The working group was interested in finding out what Giezen considered as the “essence of the work” and whether the work's condition “was in

conflict with what he had originally in mind” (Smit 2005 [1999], 95). However, based on the interview, the artist’s intention was found to be “ambiguous”. The artist’s description of the work as a visual report, a souvenir, and a memory of a trip was deemed by the group as being contradictory to the artist’s approval of the work’s decomposing state and his desire to allow the insects to continue feeding from the objects. The working group was faced with a dilemma: either to approach the object as intended to function like a souvenir, or to approach the object as intended to provide an image of continuous natural degradation (ibid., 96). The two approaches obviously pointed towards completely different treatments. Ultimately, the working group decided to focus on the work itself and to analyse the different periods in the artist’s practice, in order to determine the artist’s *original intention* — which was understood as being obscured by his later ideas.

The particular case study brought to light many of the challenges that stewards of contemporary artworks might face in their research of an artist’s intent: for instance, contradictory artist’s intentions, the potential of the artist changing their intention about the work over time, and artist’s wishes that can pose a threat to the safety of the museum’s collection. At the same time, the case study raised issues with regard to the process of interviewing: as discussed extensively in the report, the way the interview was conducted might have indeed influenced the information provided by the artist.⁴³ Further, owing to the problematic fact that the interview was conducted 24 years after the work was made,⁴⁴ the stewards were confronted with the challenge of having to determine whether the artist’s statements reflected his original intentions or new opinions influenced by his later practice.

What is clear in both the Van Amen and Giezen cases is that the aim of involving the artist in the research was to unearth and understand better the artist’s *original* intent. The working group was indeed very careful in *not* providing the artist with a sort of license or opportunity to alter or improve the artwork, or to adjust it to later ideas. For instance, when the working group was faced with a dilemma in the Giezen case, it did go against the artist’s later wishes, in order to protect his original intent (ibid., 98). From these observations we can draw two conclusions: first, that the group was acting from a primary duty towards the artwork and not towards the artist;⁴⁵ and, second, that the group approached and understood the artwork as being conceptually completed on the time of its publication.

⁴³ See: Smit 2005 [1999], 96 and 98.

⁴⁴ The work is dated 1972 and the interview took place in 22 May 1996 (ibid., 95).

⁴⁵ They involved the artist with the objective to understand and protect the artist’s *original* intent and not *any* artist’s intent.

A similar approach to the artist's intent, as the one reflected above, can be found in the presentations and discussions that took place in the MAWC conference. As I will explain below, *the focus here was also on original intent* and, although discussions with the artist were promoted as a useful research tool, *the idea of allowing artists to change their artworks over time was negatively criticised*.

The museum professionals at the conference repeatedly stressed that the *original* intent of the artist is what is valued in their research and this is also evident by the title of one of the seminars: "Working with artists in order to preserve original intent".⁴⁶ Consequently, many professionals shared their concern about cases where artists change their ideas about their works over time, as well as about stewards who uncritically follow the artist's views, without considering whether this will compromise "the artwork's essence" or will bring about a completely different artwork.⁴⁷ Curator Jaap Guldemonnd noted that what artists recount in retrospect as their original ideas and thoughts about their artwork can be inaccurate (Guldemonnd 2005 [1999], 80). Moreover, he stated that, to allow artists to continue shaping their artworks throughout their lives, is a way to "smuggle the artist's new ideas into the collection via earlier work" — commenting poignantly that "if a museum wants new ideas, it should buy a more recent piece from the same artist" (ibid., 81). In a similar vein, D.H. van Wegen warned about cases where the curator unduly "reconciles the identity of the piece [...] with the artist's views" (Van Wegen 2005 [1999], 206) and argued that, although artists are a vital source of information about their artwork, the accuracy of the information is determined by a "graded timescale". Specifically, he noted:

The artist and the work come together through the artistic intentions in the *Kunstwollen* at the moment that the work comes into being. Afterwards these works take their place in art history and the artists go on to follow their personal development. When problems arise soon after the purchase of a new work, [...], and the artist is immediately asked for a solution, one can assume that the artistic concept and the personality of its maker have still not separated so that the moment of creation can be somewhat extended [...] But the greater the distance from that moment, the further away are the artists from their artistic concept. It is therefore

⁴⁶ See: Hummelen and Sillé 2005 [1999], 391.

⁴⁷ See: Hummelen and Sillé 2005 [1999], 80, 206–7, 272–3, 321 and 398.

impossible for them to still be regarded as part of the *Kunstwollen* of the work.
(ibid.)⁴⁸

Van Wegen highlights here the fact that the artist's evolving personality cannot be rightly connected to the conditions that brought the work into being, thus the artist's new opinions cannot be granted authority. Different professionals similarly observed that artists usually lose touch with their original intent over time and stressed the importance of conducting interviews with the artist close to the time of the artwork's production.⁴⁹ For instance, conservator Carol Stringari suggested that interviews need to be conducted "at some time close to the installation of the original work" and explained that "information acquired in retrospect is often transformed quite dramatically and thus can be difficult to reconcile with the original documentation" (Stringari 2005 [1999], 279).⁵⁰

Scholars can thus be seen to draw a fine line: while they acknowledge that the artist is the individual who determines the work's identity, they further acknowledge that, after a certain point, consulting the artist can be counterproductive to the mission of preserving the work. The conclusion that was drawn from these discussions was that, in the conservation of contemporary art, the artist's opinion should be used as a guide but "in the end, the work of art will always have to remain [the] primary source of information" (Hummelen and Sillé 2005 [1999], 397).

In the overall literature of the *MAWC* project, a consensus is expressed on three matters. First, artworks were approached *as completed at the time of their publication* — it should be stressed, however, that this did not rule out physical interventions and replacement of parts, provided that they posed no risk to the conceptual integrity of the artwork. Second, owing to the fact that artists may change their intent over time, participants agreed that the role of stewards is *to unearth and honour the artist's original intent*. Third, it was agreed that the primary source of information for institutional decision-making should be the artwork's *unique conceptual and physical specificity* and not necessarily the artist.

⁴⁸ The term *Kunstwollen* was introduced by art historian and theorist Alois Riegl in 1893. Van Wegen in his essay provides the Riegl definition of the term as "the complex of conditions that produce the art work's particular design" (Van Wegen 2005 [1999], 202).

⁴⁹ See, for instance: Hummelen and Sillé 2005 [1999], 81 and 347.

⁵⁰ The idea that the validity of the artist's information relates to the proximity of such information to the work's production has also been raised in scholarship outside the *MAWC* project; see for instance: Umpleby, 2003 and Stigter, 2004.

III. Explorations of the artist's intent

From the artist's intent to the artist's sanction

Almost ten years after the *MAWC* conference, conservation scholar Pip Laurenson published her highly influential essay “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media” (2006). In this essay, Laurenson explores the assumed discord between perpetuation and change by focusing on the concept of authenticity: whereas in the case of traditional fine art objects authenticity is linked to the traces of the artist's hand, in the case of contemporary artworks, Laurenson notes, authenticity is linked to those properties that the artist identifies as “mandatory” for the artwork. In particular: drawing on the philosopher Nelson Goodman's ontological distinction between autographic and allographic works,⁵¹ as well as on philosopher Stephen Davies's ontology of musical performances,⁵² Laurenson proposed a shift of attention from a notion of authenticity as physical integrity, to a notion of authenticity as intactness of the work's defining properties. Looking at notational systems and exploring an analogy between musical works and time-based media installations,⁵³ Laurenson suggests that the determination of an artwork's defining properties can establish the limits of a work's acceptable change — so that it becomes “possible for two performances or installations of a work to differ but both be authentic” (Laurenson 2006, sentence 31). In addition, Laurenson explores Davies's distinction of an artwork being “thinly” vs. “thickly” specified by the artist. This distinction (which refers to the degree to which the properties of an artwork are detailed by the artist) reversely corresponds to the level of interpretation needed for the work to be instantiated, as well as to the level of variation that can appear between instantiations. On the whole, as Laurenson explicitly states in her text, the proposed conceptual framework has at its core a specific shift of focus for preservation efforts: from an object's state, to the artwork's identity

⁵¹ According to Nelson Goodman's distinction, a work of art is autographic “if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine” (Goodman 1976, 113); while a work of art is allographic, when it can be instantiated based on a “score” which is to “specify the essential properties a performance must have to belong to the work” (ibid., 212).

⁵² Stephen Davies “Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration” 2001.

⁵³ Pip Laurenson's 2006 text explored the analogy between musical performances and contemporary artworks to the extent of developing a new conceptual framework for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks — it is important to note, however, that accounts of this analogy have been used by artists in discussing the perpetuation of their work already in the 1990's. See curator Christine Berndes referring to a dialogue with artist Suchan Kinoshita (Hummelen and Sillé 2005 [1999]: 175); and see curator Mildred Constantine referring to a 1996 interview she had with artist Sol LeWitt (Corzo 1999, xi).

— defining identity as “everything that must be preserved in order to avoid the loss of something of value in the work of art” (Ibid., sentence 51).

As it can be observed from the analysis so far, scholars have been variously addressing the fact that the identity of an artwork cannot be entirely revealed through an encounter with an instantiation and that information from the artist is required in order to determine what is constitutive of the work. They can thus be seen to outline an expanded notion of the artwork, which encompasses, what I would call, an informational component. From this perspective it is acknowledged that an artist’s account of his/her work can be more than a casual suggestion: under specific conditions, it can constitute an act of determination of the artwork’s identity and should be binding for the work’s custodians.

This stance is shared and defended by philosopher Sherri Irvin. Acknowledging the challenges that contemporary artworks pose for any act of interpretation, appreciation and even conservation, Irvin argues that what is needed in response to those challenges is a specification of a work’s “boundaries”: i.e., of the properties that an adequate grasp of the work needs to take into account. Although Irvin assigns a central role to the artist in relation to this project of specification, she argues that the artist’s intention is insufficient for the task: intentions (hypothesised or actual) can be failed or unexecuted. Thus, she proposes a new concept, proper to the relevant task: the “artist’s sanction”, which refers to the artist’s overt actions and communications that determine the range of features constitutive of the work’s identity (Irvin 2005b, 319). With reference specifically to the installation of works, Irvin characteristically notes that “when the artist supplies a set of instructions for installation, this is part of what makes the artwork what it is” (Irvin 2006, 144).

Irvin discusses the artist’s sanction as an “outgrowth of the artist’s intentional activity,” one that functions as a “contract” (Irvin 2005b, 321). Standard ways in which an artist establishes sanctions are, for instance: “presenting an object within a particular context, [...] giving the work a title, offering an artist statement to accompany the work, or instructing curators about conservation or the conditions of display” (ibid., 319). For Irvin, such events need to be approached by the work’s audiences and stewards as having the same authority in constituting the work as the configuration of colours in a traditional painting. The authoritative status of sanction is stressed when Irvin refers, for instance, to the artwork *Production* (1980) by Liz Magor stating: “the work is not simply the bricks and the press, but the bricks and press installed in accordance with the standards the artist has indicated” (Irvin 2006, 144).

On the issue of the artwork’s completion, Irvin, expresses the same stance as the MAWC participants: one needs to consider the artworks that enter a collection as completed and the

artist's subsequent interventions as alterations. For instance, she remarks: "in agreeing to the transaction in which the work passes from the artist's hands into the museum's collection, the artist has declared the work finished, and relinquishes her right to tinker with the objects without the museum's permission" (ibid., 155). Irvin, further suggests that an artist's "continued meddling, could make the artwork worse rather than better" adding that regulating the artist's access and authority can provide "a degree of aesthetic protection for works and their viewers" (ibid.). However, Irvin neither explores whether there are theoretical implications in this type of alterations, nor specifies the principles that can guide a museum in their management: she simply comments that museums "should be free to accept or refuse" them (ibid.).

Evolving intentions?

In the last decade, conservation scholars have continued enriching the discourse, delving deeper into issues such as the artwork's constitution and completion, the primacy of the artist's original intent in decision-making, and the institutional influence on the artwork's instantiation over time.

Art historians Rebecca Gordon and Erma Hermens in their 2013 essay the "Artist's intent in Flux" observe that a work may evolve from installation to installation and context to context and they question the primacy of the artist's *original* intent. They suggest that, instead of focusing attention on the artist's intention in one historical moment (the artwork's creation), the aim of a steward should be to understand the artist's wider decision-making process: it is this process that defines the identity of the artwork (Gordon and Hermens 2013, paragraph 21). However, while Gordon and Hermens regard the artist's intention as potentially evolving, they raise a normative frame when it comes to the artist's licence to alter their works that are part of a collection. They argue that "the reliability of this potentially variable intention stems from it being evidenced in the artwork and the context of the work's creation" (ibid., paragraph 23). In other words, the artist's intent may evolve over time, but in order to remain a valid source of information for perpetuation purposes it needs to *not* contradict the artwork and the context of its creation. Therefore, although Gordon and Hermens acknowledge that the artist's intent can be in flux, still they do not defend the idea that artists should be granted authority to change their work as they change their minds.

In a 2014 essay, Rebecca Gordon continued questioning the need for a strict focus on original intent and highlighted the value of granting the artist the opportunity to engage with

their work over time. Considering the adjustments that an artist makes to their work between different displays (or different settings) as *opportunities* for the artist to explore a work from different angles, Gordon argues that it is particularly through this process that the artwork's identity becomes manifest. Based on the premise that the artwork's identity becomes manifest over time, she introduced the concept of "*critical mass*", which she defined as "the optimum choice and grouping of factors or attributes that demonstrate the core identity of the work of art" (Gordon 2014, 97).⁵⁴ Gordon claimed that an artwork's critical mass is identified by studying the pattern that emerges across a series of reinstallations and through interviewing the artist and understanding the values they allocate to the work's properties.

Gordon illustrated her theory using as a case study the artwork *Journey to the Edge of the World – The New Republic of St. Kilda* (1999–2002) by Ross Sinclair and its six successive reinstallations from 1999 to 2010. The work is a multipart, multi-space installation consisting of video and slide projections, audio elements, modular structures made of cardboard boxes, text, and drawings. For her analysis Gordon uses available documentation of the work's six exhibitions and an interview of the artist about the artwork, conducted in 2005 by conservator Barbara Sommermeyer as part of the SBMK project *Inside Installations*.⁵⁵ When I looked back on this interview, it became evident that the artist never considered the artwork's initial installation as the absolute ideal. Sinclair described particular features from the 1999 installation as neither intended nor desirable and attributed them to pragmatic constraints such as the size of the projection room.⁵⁶ At the same time, he identified different features that he considered problematic also in the subsequent displays, again due to pragmatic constraints. In other words, none of the different displays of the work could be pinpointed as an exemplary case that embodies fully the identity of the artwork. Therefore, a cross-reference of the artist's decisions is necessary in order to identify what is ideal, what is acceptable and what is non-acceptable for the artist and Gordon captures this important point in her proposed concept of critical mass.

In her paper, Gordon positions the artist as both the "unifying factor" and the "orchestrator" of the work's variations (ibid., 105). However, she also suggests that, when the

⁵⁴ Gordon proposed the concept of "critical mass", arguing that, when discussing the conservation of "dematerialised and context-dependent art", the use of the loaded and variably defined concept of authenticity can lead to miscommunication (Gordon 2014, 95 and 97).

⁵⁵ Gordon, actually, borrows the term "critical mass" from Sinclair, who, discussing the different parts of the installation and the flexibility that they afford him, states in his interview: "I could cut this one and that one - like in Basel the parliament was not there - but there is still a critical mass that holds it together; the basic conceptual premise for it, so it is somehow alive" (Sommermeyer 2005, 11). Here, Gordon refers to critical mass as an aggregation of elements, which holds together the basic conceptual principle of the work.

⁵⁶ See: Sommermeyer 2005, 17–8.

core identity of the work has been identified, it might become possible for stewards to make decisions about the work's appropriate future incarnations and potential conservation treatments without the direct involvement of the artist and without the need of fixing the work's form and context to a specific point in time. In other words, Gordon, in a similar manner to Pip Laurenson, draws a theoretical framework that is centred around the requirement to establish an artwork's core identity: a framework where, as she remarks, "preserving the 'real thing'" is possible without necessitating material or contextual fixity (ibid., 106).

Much like Gordon, conservator Joanna Phillips has claimed (referring to TBM artworks), that, often, a number of different iterations are needed "to explore and define the variability of the piece in reaction to different spaces devices or technologies" (Phillips 2012, 152). She actually introduced the concept of "young artworks" for those works for which no opportunity has arisen for their identity to be fully articulated and/or explored by the artist (ibid., 150). Phillips, as Gordon, accords to the artist the role of determining an artwork's identity: she thus claims that "until a work has fully developed its identity, the power of decision remains with the artist," adding that "the conservator must avoid determining work-defining properties prematurely, and more importantly, without the artist's consultation" (ibid. 152). She further notes, however, that after the work's identity has been established, the artist's specifications, although essential for decision-making, have to be contextualised in terms of the framework and ethics of collection care. In other words, while Phillips acknowledges the need for collecting institutions to establish a comprehensive notion of the artwork's identity and a clear picture of what constitutes an ideal for the artist, she also highlights the fact that the ideal has often to be subjected to pragmatic constraints. In a following essay, Phillips brings attention to the impact that "institutional preferences and practicalities" can have on the characteristics of an instantiation—and thus on the artwork,—and argues that "collection staff must fully understand the degree of compromise (or even damage) that certain adjustments may introduce to an artwork in order to avoid them in the future" (Phillips 2015, 169).

As a way to safeguard the artwork's identity and manage change, Phillips points to the role of documentation and the need to effectively track institutional decision-making and its reasoning. She brings up the example of the Guggenheim *Documentation Model for Time-based Media Art*, which is centred on a two-stage reporting structure (applying Nelson Goodman's notion of two-stage artworks), involving both an *Identity Report* for the artwork

and an *Iteration Report*⁵⁷ for each of its iterations. The *Iteration Report*, beyond registering details about the form of an iteration, provides a space where decision-making can become transparent and traceable; for instance, Phillips notes that it can offer information on “whether installation details represent the artist’s ideal or the curator’s compromise” (ibid., 177). What is notable about this practice is that by classifying the information about an artwork’s identity and an artwork’s iteration separately, the Model, ultimately, advocates a hierarchy of information.⁵⁸ Specifically, information about decisions made during an iteration is approached as relating to a particular context that is *temporary*; while information about the artwork’s identity is approached as *transcending* that about a single iteration. The organisation of information in two separate clusters prevents the former overriding the latter.

The need to be able to identify the input of stewards in a work’s instantiation and documentation has also been addressed by conservator Sanneke Stigter. Stigter (2015) has stressed how important it is that stewards produce detailed records where they acknowledge and reflect critically on their involvement. In particular, she has proposed the implementation of what she calls a *conservator’s testimony*: “a personal account and thorough analyses of the context in which the research material is brought together, studied, interpreted and translated into practical measures, including critical reflections on conclusions and research findings” (Stigter 2015, 107).

Stigter’s proposal does not proceed solely from the demand of transparency: she discusses the conservator’s testimony as a “contemporary substitute of reversibility” (Stigter 2016a, 231). In particular, she stresses the need to distinguish the input of the artist from the input of other stewards — i.e., the need to determine “who is actually shaping what in each iteration of the artwork” (Stigter 2015, 108). Defending her proposal of the “conservator’s testimony”, Stigter makes reference to the “cultural biography”⁵⁹ approach that was introduced in the contemporary art conservation discourse through a 2011 essay that she co-authored with Renée van de Vall, Hanna Hölling and Tatja Scholte. The four scholars had proposed a biographical approach to contemporary art conservation as a way to “identify and compare stages and turning points in artworks’ lives” (Van de Vall et al. 2011, 6). Stigter notes that their 2011 essay should not be misinterpreted as proposing a normative framework for conservation: “[t]he biographical approach recognizes that objects change over time, as does their social

⁵⁷ The *Iteration Report* has been used at the Guggenheim Museum since 2011 and was developed with the support of conservator Christine Frohnert. See: Phillips 2015, 178–9.

⁵⁸ Indeed, Phillips refers to the information included in the *Identity Report* as of “higher-level” (ibid., 178).

⁵⁹ The concept of “cultural biography” was borrowed from the field of anthropology, see: Kopytoff 1986.

context. It does not, however, provide solutions for complex issues in conservation. Accepting change *per se* is not what conservation is about, but managing change is” (Stigter 2016a, 227). The “conservator’s testimony”, as it entails detailed tracing and critical assessment of one’s own involvement and decisions, is a means by which to protect the work’s essence: it can prevent mistaking adaptations and alterations for intrinsic features of the artwork (Stigter 2015, 105). To this extent, it can clearly qualify as a tool for managing change.

The case of unfolding artworks

As already mentioned in the Introduction, Pip Laurenson has drawn attention to a further kind of development within contemporary art: i.e. the previously uncharted category of contemporary artworks “that defy the idea of completeness and continue to want to unfold within the museum ... works with more adaptive DNA, including within them instructions for growth and development” (Laurenson 2016).⁶⁰ Laurenson criticises her past (highly influential) work as not being accommodating of unfolding artworks and underlines the need for museums to adjust their practices in order to enable those artworks to 'continue to unfold' (ibid.)⁶¹. It is important to stress however that, as Laurenson makes clear, *not all variable artworks are unfolding*;⁶² it is thus of paramount importance that the particular distinction is made when the artwork enters a collection, so that the appropriate approach to stewardship can be determined. In an unfolding artwork, as for instance *Predictive Engineering* (1993–present) by Julia Scher,⁶³ it is intrinsic to the work that the context of each instantiation is used as material for the artist to generate new content for the artwork. While in a variable (but non unfolding) artwork, as for instance *News* (1969–2008) by Hans Haacke,⁶⁴ the context of each instantiation is just one that the work is required to be adjusted on. Unfolding artworks, in order to be kept active, require the generative engagement of the artist: an on-going, creative and in-depth re-improvisation of the work’s constitutive elements in relation to new contexts.⁶⁵ This requires

⁶⁰ Reference at 43:20.

⁶¹ Reference at 16:35.

⁶² For instance, Laurenson contrasts unfolding artworks to thickly specified allographic ones.

⁶³ For information on the artwork see: Appendix II (page 185). For more information about the artwork’s 2016 instantiation (made possible through SFMOMA’s Artist Initiative), see: www.sfmoma.org/watch/museum-producer-julia-schers-empredictive-engineeringem/ [accessed 26 August 2019].

⁶⁴ For information on how the work has been adjusted since the initial 1969 instantiation, see: Barok et al. 2019.

⁶⁵ For instance, *Belshazzar’s Feast, The Writing on Your Wall* by Susan Hiller (which Laurenson uses as a reference to unfolding artworks) was clearly sanctioned as an ongoing project by the way the artist significantly transformed the outlook of the piece in each one of its four initial instantiations that took place between 1985 and 1986.

museums to actively involve the artist in each instantiation and to facilitate them in their creative process. However, it is not ethically justifiable for institutions to expand this type of stewardship approach to variable artworks that are not originally sanctioned as ongoing projects. This view is shared by Glenn Wharton, who considers the “greater acceptance of reworking earlier installation, media and performance works that were not originally intended to be radically reconstituted” as being “a troubling trend” in current museum practices (Wharton 2016, 34).

This issue brings us to the subject of overarching ethical guidelines for the care of contemporary artworks and how effective they can be. While the applicability of traditional conservation ethics to contemporary art has been widely contested,⁶⁶ scholars seem to also agree that the idiosyncratic nature of contemporary artworks makes the establishment of *any* overarching guidelines an improbable task. As philosopher Renée Van de Vall argues, contemporary art conservation can only be approached on a case-by-case basis and the ethics of contemporary art conservation could never move to “a normal state of rule-application” (Van de Vall 2015a, 16). Conservation scholar Jill Sterrett has offered a similar view:

I don't aspire to something beyond the case-by-case. What we're trying to develop with contemporary art is a methodology around problem solving,” explaining further that she doesn't anticipate this “to lead to prescribed methods—except as it has to do with the way that we tease apart the challenges and arrive at our solutions. (GCI 2009).

Concluding Remarks

To conclude the above overview of the scholarship, we should note the shared grounds of the different approaches examined. First, museums are presented as required to unearth and protect the core identity of the artwork: material variability is thus justified on the grounds of safeguarding conceptual integrity. Second, the artist is considered as the sole actor entitled to determine the identity of the work. Third, it is acknowledged that, in particular cases, the artwork's identity becomes manifest over the process of the artist installing the work in different settings, thus over time. Fourth, while scholars acknowledge the museum's influence on the ways in which the work is instantiated over time, they also address the need to regulate

⁶⁶ See, for instance: Buskirk 2003; Wharton 2005; Laurenson 2006; Macedo 2006; Saaze 2013; Van de Vall 2015a.

such influence in order for the core identity of the work to be protected.⁶⁷ It is important to note, however, that the varied instantiations of an artwork and the influence that museum professionals often have in what is being documented about an artwork, as well as in how an artwork is instantiated over time, are all complex theoretical issues that have been often conceptualised differently by different scholars.

Having drawn an overview of the shared underlying ideas in the prevailing theoretical frameworks, in the following sections I will consider two challenges to the thesis that has been outlined and which I endorse: i.e., that the aim of perpetuation practices is to unearth and safeguard an artwork's core identity, as it has been sanctioned by the artist. The first challenge stems from a proposal to embrace the fading of any originary presence, rather than aiming towards a legitimate instance of an artwork. The second challenge stems from a proposal to conceive the contemporary artwork as being collectively authored by the artist and the museum professionals charged with the artwork's care.

IV. A Challenge (I): From artwork's core identity to *rupture*

In her 2009 essay "*White Walls: Installations, Absence, Iteration and Difference*", art historian Tina Fiske calls for a critical framework that accounts for "rupture" and "difference" between instantiations (Fiske 2009, 231–2). She brings into question a conservator's ethical remit which is "focused on minimizing the erosion of identity between instances of a work" — as it is reflected in methodologies grounded on the use of notational systems and informed by the scholarship of philosophers such as Nelson Goodman and Stephen Davies (ibid., 234). Proposing an alternative perspective, she ponders whether "conservation might broach something akin to an ethics of alterity or otherness" (ibid., 232). Fiske makes particular reference to philosopher Jacques Derrida's concepts of *différance*⁶⁸ and *iterability*⁶⁹ and remarks: "I wonder if we might think of the set of practices (de-installation, documentation, re-installation and so on) that keep any one installation viable as 'the movement of *différance*'"

⁶⁷ The outlined principles seem to be shared by a plethora of additional scholars, whose contributions cannot be presented in detail within the bounds of a thesis. See, for instance: Mancusi-Ungaro 2007; Pugliese et al. 2008; Barros Oliveira and Macedo 2009; Gunnar Heydenreich 2011; Chiantore and Rava 2013 [originally published in the Italian language in 2005], 166–175 and 188–193; and, Noordegraaf 2015.

⁶⁸ As Fiske informs her readers: "Derrida described *différance* as the 'disappearance of any originary presence'" (Fiske 2009, 235).

⁶⁹ Fiske presents Derrida's iterability as "a possibility that 'alters, divides, expropriates, contaminates what it identifies and enables to repeat itself'" and as "a mode of repetition that, rather than 'aspiring to the fulfilment of the original,' searches or reaches beyond the original itself" (ibid., 232 and 234–5).

(ibid., 235). Fiske presents this movement as being opposed to one that is in pursuit of “fulfilment and actualization”, which she relates to a quest for an artwork’s “legitimate instance” (ibid., 234–5).

Fiske supports her proposal using as a case study the artwork *White Walls*, 2007 by Andy Goldsworthy. *White Walls* involves a layer of white wet clay, applied directly as a smooth and even coating on the walls of an exhibition room. During the period of the exhibition, the clay is to dry, crack and fall on the floor in its own pace and manner. In her essay Fiske described in detail how the clay performed in the given setting of the work’s initial 2007 instantiation in Galerie Lelong and remarked how the clay could react differently in different conditions:

In view of the environmental contingencies of the Lelong space, installing *White Walls* elsewhere, subject to other environmental conditions, could issue a very different *White Walls*. What if, in a subsequent context, for instance, all of the clay remained adhered to its host walls? If it did, how would it relate to the first realization, wherein the dramatic manner of its de-installation became so definitively part of the work? Installed in another context, *White Walls* could exhibit profound differences. (ibid., 231)

Fiske further commented that the manner in which the clay actually de-attached from the wall in the 2007 instantiation defeated one of the artist’s expectations: i.e., to recycle the clay for future instantiations of the artwork. According to Fiske, the possibility of difference between instantiations and the breach of the artist’s expectations point towards a need for a critical framework that allows conservation to embrace “alterity”. Fiske’s idea, however, can be challenged especially on four points and from the standpoint of a notational system approach.

First, Fiske discusses the breach of an artist’s expectation as evidencing a rupture in the artwork. However, *there is no indication that the artist’s expectation was a constitutive property of the artwork.*⁷⁰ *White Walls* has been described by the representative of the artist as a work that initiates a type of trigger that sets in motion the volition of matter. To quote from

⁷⁰ In the Press Release for the exhibition in the Galerie Lelong (New York, USA), that was open to the public between May 8 and June 16 2007, the work was introduced as follows: “Over the course of several days, moist porcelain from Cornwall, U.K., where the artist was born, will be laid over the gallery walls — covering an expanse 13 feet in height and over 140 feet in length. Once completed and uncovered on May 8, the room will appear empty. Then, slowly, the clay will begin to dry and crack throughout the surface. The manner in which the clay will crack and, subsequently, fall from the wall is uncertain.”

See: www.galerielelong.com/exhibitions/andy-goldsworthy3/installation-views?view=slider [accessed 10 July 2019].

the Press Release of the exhibition where the artwork was first instantiated: “[t]he manner in which the clay will crack and, subsequently, fall from the wall is uncertain”. What I understand from this description is that it is, actually, one of the constitutive properties of the artwork that its unravelling is *not* subjected to regulatory expectations.

Second, Fiske argues that different environmental conditions can bring about “a very different *White Walls*” (ibid., 231). However, I want to counterargue that different environmental conditions can bring about a different appearance/performance for the artwork but not a different artwork. Change in the appearance and/or performance of the instantiation does not bring about a different *White Walls*, since control of the appearance/performance of instantiations is not a constitutive property of the particular artwork (according to the Press Release, rather the opposite is the case). Fiske here conflates the artwork and its instance, as if these were one and the same. This approach has been widely challenged within the domain of philosophical aesthetics and I will explore the issue at length later in this Chapter.

Third, Fiske claims that existing frameworks cannot account for variations such as the ones exhibited in and/or anticipated for *White Walls* (ibid., 231–2). However, I want to suggest that frameworks which are based on a notational system —such as the ones put forward by scholars Sherri Irvin (in 2005) or Pip Laurenson (in 2006)— do exactly that. By supporting the determination of the artwork’s boundaries, they do accommodate variations and change of the types that enable the perpetuation of the artwork. This requires that the notation is sensitive to the artwork’s idiosyncrasy and that it is a product of thorough research, not committing the fallacy of rendering everything that can be observed in an instantiation of the work as constitutive of it.

Fourth, it should be noted that Fiske invites conservation to embrace “alterity” and “*différance*”, however she does not offer any information on the type of museum/stewardship practice that her theoretical proposition would translate into. For instance, what would the embrace of “alterity” mean in practical terms with regard to honouring the artist’s moral rights? The artist’s moral rights are protected by national laws but also internationally since 1928.⁷¹ To understand the significance of this legislation, it is useful to draw on law scholar John Henry Merryman. As Merryman explains, the moral rights legislation, although registered as protecting the rights of the artist, fundamentally protects a “collective social interest” — that is “the interest of others in seeing, or preserving the opportunity to see, the work as the artist intended it, undistorted and ‘unimproved’ by the unilateral actions of others, even those with

⁷¹ For more information on artist’s moral rights see: Appendix III (page 187).

the best intentions and the most impressive credentials” (Merryman 1976, 1041). How can the notion of *différance* (as the “disappearance of any originary presence”) support museums in protecting the “collective social interest” described by Merryman? Fiske’s proposal seems to be totally incompatible with the commonly agreed state of affairs in art stewardship — a state of affairs that is reflected in the museum’s narrative, in heritage legislation, as well as in the artists’ and audience’s expectations with regard to the role of museums. Unless this state of affairs is radically reformed, Fiske’s proposal cannot but remain in the realm of a pure rhetoric.

V. A Challenge (II): from custodians to co-creators of identity

In a series of essays (starting from 2009), Vivian Van Saaze approached contemporary art stewardship from the perspective of ‘actor-network’ theory (ANT) and the writings of philosopher of science Bruno Latour. Based on the ANT analysis of artworks as the products of the collective activity of multiple actors, and the idea of an artwork having a trajectory, Van Saaze explored the influence museums have in the constitution of contemporary artworks and brought about issues of transparency. Referring in particular to the artwork’s “physical history”, “material changes” and “alterations in appearance”, Van Saaze criticises museums for keeping them hidden (Van Saaze 2009b, 20). She highlights the role museum professionals play in the changes she observes and she claims that the contributions of these actors can alter the artwork (*ibid.*). Based on these observations, Van Saaze argues for the benefit of bringing the museum’s backstage into the frontstage (Van Saaze 2011b).

Transparency and reflectivity are undoubtedly part of the foundations of good museum practice and, as Van Saaze suggests, issues of change, intervention and production need to be publicly acknowledged — not bracketed or erased (Van Saaze 2009b, 21). However, beyond a call to the contemporary art museum for transparency and reflectivity, Van Saaze argues that it is the practice of the museum that “constitutes the identity of the artwork” and disputes an approach to conservation where “the identity of an artwork that has entered the museum is understood as an entity that can be known, captured and truthfully re-presented” (*ibid.*, 27). Most importantly, Van Saaze promotes the idea that museum professionals are *entitled* to constitute the identity of the artworks in their care, since, as she claims, there is a need to reframe their processes “as part of artistic practices” (Van Saaze 2011b, 246–7). In a similar vein, when she refers to processes of documentation and to the artist’s interview, Van Saaze proposes a re-conceptualisation of the role of the conservator from an artwork’s custodian to

its “co-creator”, based on the observation that the interviewer and the interviewee are both constructing knowledge during the interviewing process (Van Saaze 2009c, 25 and 21).

In her analysis of museum’s management of authenticity, Van Saaze seems to argue simultaneously for two points. On the one hand, she argues that the contemporary art museum constructs and manages a narrative of authenticity —what she calls a “repertoire of singularity” (Van Saaze 2009a, 195),— as a way to further legitimise its collected entities, by adding to them an aura of the unique. I fully endorse this claim; indeed, one can observe (both in literature but also in institutional displays) some clear cases where a narrative of the unique is forced by the museum onto works that otherwise subvert a valorisation focused on material authenticity.⁷² On the other hand (and as elaborated in the breadth of her scholarship), Van Saaze argues that it is ultimately the museum that constructs the identity of a contemporary artwork, thus regarding museum professionals as co-creators of the work, together with the artist. This claim (which I understand as being partly connected to that of Fiske) appears to be increasingly popular with a younger generation of scholars⁷³, starting to form what could perhaps be described as a new tendency in the contemporary art conservation discourse. Still: I have reservations about this popular trend of thought and I will analyse them in some detail in what follows. My analysis will target four issues: the distinction between the artwork and its instance; the obligation to establish boundaries between what can change and what cannot between instantiations of a work; the distinct authority of the artist over their artwork; and the risks involved in approaching an artwork’s identity as determined by, and malleable to, the museum’s volition.

Defending museum’s investment in an artwork’s core identity.

A. The importance of distinguishing between the artwork and its instance

Challenging the idea that authenticity can be located with “the artwork or the artist”, Van Saaze argues that authenticity is “done”, “enacted” and “constructed” in museum practices (Van Saaze 2009a, 197). In presenting her argument, she uses the case of the artwork *One Candle* (1988) by Nam June Paik. *One Candle* involves a lit candle in an exhibition room, filmed by a

⁷² Van Saaze illustrates her point very effectively with the case of *One Candle* (Van Saaze 2013, 61-108). An alternative case involves the interactive audio installation *Random Access* (1963/1999) by Nam June Paik, where an artist’s signature on an acrylic casing is being discussed as a token of the work’s authenticity, while the artwork is, in fact, not tied to a unique material vehicle but, in contrast, employs solely replaceable equipment to perform its designated function (for further information about the artwork, see Phillips 2012, 143–7).

⁷³ See, for instance: Castriota 2019; and, Marçal 2019 (particularly section “Reshaping the collectible: a perspective in context”).

camera and projected live in the same room using multiple projectors. Each projector is manipulated, so as to project the video's three colour-channels separately. Concentrating on the work's various instantiations and the ways in which the work has been materially altered over time, Van Saaze argues that *One Candle* "is not singular by nature" but "multiple" (ibid., 195). However, on the grounds of a notational framework and Goodman's theory of allographic artworks, I want to retort that, while *One Candle* is not singular as an object, it is still singular as an artwork. This tension is possible because Nam June Paik has clearly sanctioned *One Candle* not as a self-contained art object but as a specific, yet repeatable, event. His sanction was established, for instance, by him deciding to have the work presented, at times, simultaneously in two venues; and, in other occasions, by him having replaced the projectors used for the artwork and having supervised their modification, in order for them to perform within his intended parameters (Van Saaze 2013, 92 and 95). Further, I want to suggest that the artwork is not only singular but it has also remained unchanged, regardless of its varied appearance between instantiations and its material alterations (or rather *thanks* to them). Van Saaze notes that due to the various material changes she "found it hard to locate the work's authenticity in one single condition and moment in time". But if we pay attention to Paik's sanction with regard to *One Candle*, we can identify a single authenticating condition for the work and this concerns the work's functionality; while the moment in time when the work's authenticating factors were established is the moment Paik introduced his artwork to the public and this was in 1988, in Portikus Gallery, Frankfurt. From this point of view, it is clear that all later interventions just *ensured* the work's perpetuation and reaffirmed the work's constitutive properties. What is multiple, in this case, is not the artwork but the work's instantiations.

It is possible that Van Saaze arrives at her conclusion because she conflates the artwork and its instance, as if these were one and the same — as Tina Fiske did in her 2009 essay discussed earlier.⁷⁴ The distinction between an artwork and its instance —sometimes discussed as that between the work of art and its vehicle/manifestation/ vehicular medium/ spatiotemporal event/ physical embodiment— has been variously theorised by many different philosophers. For instance, Gregory Currie's suggests that we "use the general term 'instance' to cover all those concrete things that we come into contact with when we experience a work of art" (Currie 1989, 5). And Arthur Danto has remarked: "the physical object *p* stands to the whole in virtue of which it is recognized as an artwork in something like the relationship in which a physical

⁷⁴ I want to observe that this appears to be a common oversight between contemporary art conservation scholars; for another example, see: Stigter 2015.

body stands to the whole in virtue of which it is recognized as a person” (Danto 1993, 199).⁷⁵ As has perhaps been clear from my overall analysis, I consider this distinction as being of paramount importance for the understanding of artworks and of their stewardship requirements.⁷⁶

To return to the case of *One Candle*, I would argue that the artwork remained unchanged, despite the various changes that Van Saaze cites in her reports. From this perspective, any influence that the museum professionals might have had, was an influence on the artwork’s instances and an influence that the artist had permitted and, indeed, intended as part of the artwork’s identity.

B. The requirement of establishing boundaries between what can change and what cannot

Vivian Van Saaze claims that her proposal to study museum practices and to consider the artwork’s authenticity as constructed therein is offered as an alternative to frameworks that either locate the authenticity of a work with the artwork and the artist or approach authenticity as, solely, a matter of subjective interpretations (Van Saaze 2009a, 197). Van Saaze admittedly proposes a useful study for contemporary art museums and their practices. However, her proposal might generate some resistance, if conceived as putting forward a normative framework for the perpetuation of artworks. How can one make legitimate decisions for the perpetuation of an artwork without attending to this artwork and to the artist’s sanctions?

It should be noted that, in place of authenticity, Van Saaze introduces the concept of “continuity”, which, as she explains, “suggests maintenance but also allows for flexibility and change” (ibid.). But again: how are museums to establish the particular parameters that will frame the boundaries of flexibility and change for the individual artwork, if not by attending to the artwork and the artist’s sanction? It needs to be stressed that the concept of authenticity does not rule out flexibility and change, as noted earlier. In particular, when applied to presentation rather than mere provenance, the concept of authenticity entails that variable artworks can be diverse between different iterations and in particular ways, if they are sanctioned (by their artist) to be diverse and to be diverse in those very ways. Thus, what the

⁷⁵ For a synoptic, yet comprehensive, overview of different philosophical ideas on the subject, see: Livingston 2016, sections 2.2 and 4.

⁷⁶ There are theorists who present this distinction as equivalent to the one between type and token. The distinction between a type and its tokens was first introduced by philosopher C. S. Peirce and refers to the distinction between a generic entity and its elements (see: Wollheim 1980 [1968] section 35.) The type-token distinction has been theorised differently by different scholars in aesthetics, and has also been analysed as one concerning specifically the ontology of allographic artworks (see: Wollheim 1980 [1968] sections 35 to 37, Livingston 2016, section 3.2 and Wetzel 2018, section 2.2.). I align with this later perspective, according to which the artwork-instance distinction and the type-token distinction have a different extension or scope.

concept of authenticity rules out is unregulated flexibility and change, which also goes against the legislation concerning the artist's moral rights and, more generally, the values museums claim to endorse as guardians of works of art.

C. The distinct authority of an artist over their work

Van Saaze discusses the influence museum professionals can have on a contemporary artwork during instantiation, documentation and/or production processes as constitutive of the artwork, and she proposes an understanding of these actors as “co-creators” of the artwork.⁷⁷ I am concerned that this argument can lead one to the erroneous conclusion that the artist and the museum professionals in charge of perpetuating a work share the same authority in this work's constitution. In response, I want to suggest that we need to pay attention to the important distinction between influence and creation, or else, between creative input and artistic authorship (which might be singular or multiple).⁷⁸ This distinction becomes clear in light of contemporary philosophical theories on the nature of artistic authorship, which identify criteria for authorship in relation to a particular type of *responsibility* for the work — a responsibility which is not linked to a particular type of involvement in the actual production of the authored entity.⁷⁹ For instance, Sherri Irvin, in her essay “Appropriation and authorship in contemporary art”, identifies a *single* criterion for artistic authorship: an actor contributing an entity to the art discourse and taking personal responsibility for the objectives of this contribution. As Irvin points out, objectives can, indeed, be subject to influence.

But influence, while useful in providing suggestions, can never settle the issue of what the artist should do: she must always decide whether to accept or reject its dictates. [...] The artist's authorship relation to her work [...] does not consist in either her mode of production or the type of product. The artist's authorship is defined by the fact that she bears ultimate responsibility for every aspect of the

⁷⁷ See: Van Saaze 2009b and 2009c.

⁷⁸ As it is beyond the scope of this research to discuss the wider art sociological perspective, which positions artworks at large as shaped by social conventions and collective actions (see, for instance: Becker 2008 and Laermans 2008), I will just observe that the sociological claim does not rule out the possibility of defining authorship as a type of contribution *distinct* to that of other actors. Philosopher Karen Gover remarks: “one can give credence to the sociological emphasis on art making and authorship as governed by collective action and social norms while still recognizing that individual artists and artworks exist”, pointing out further that “Becker himself can insist on the inherently collaborative nature of authorship, yet still claim, without contradiction, credit for authoring *Art Worlds*” (Gover 2018, 59).

⁷⁹ See: Irvin 2005a; Livingston 2005; Sellors 2007; Livingston and Archer 2010; Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010; Mag Uidhir 2011 and 2013; and, Gover 2018.

objectives she pursues through her work, and thus every aspect of the work itself.
(Irvin 2005a, 134)

According to Irvin, the contributed entity need not be produced by the work's author: instead, the attribution of authorship concerns an actor being directly responsible for an entity claiming art-status. As Irvin explains, this *single* criterion for artistic authorship is dictated by the specificity of contemporary art practices themselves — as for instance those involved in the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp or, more broadly, in appropriation art. In other words, Irvin's stance on authorship targets practices that challenge traditional conceptions of authorship — practices which associate authorship with an actor determining the *making* of the contributed entity (ibid., 124–7).

As Irvin identifies authorship with taking direct responsibility for an entity's art status, Karen Gover similarly argues that the attribution of authorship relates to an actor having the special authority to evaluate whether to accept or reject an entity as their own work of art.⁸⁰ As Gover points out, “the most fundamental form of artistic freedom involves the artist's authority to accept or disavow the works she produces, to curate the works that bear her name and come to represent her artistic oeuvre” (Gover 2018, 161). I want to suggest that this freedom (which is even legally protected by moral rights legislation) invests the artist with a unique authority not only in relation to what the artist produces but also in relation to museum processes of perpetuation. It would be misleading to present decision-making as equally shared between the artist and the museum professionals, since (subject to the conditions cited earlier and noted below) it is the artist who has the authority and freedom to reject an instantiation or treatment as producing an instance that they cannot accept as part of their oeuvre.

Similarly, on the issue of artists' interviews and the influence of interviewers,⁸¹ I want to argue that it would be misleading to conceive the influence that museum professionals can have in an artist's interview as being a case of co-creating the artwork with the artist: the artist eventually has the authority to embrace or to reject any given documentation (and this includes conclusions of an interview), as representing or not representing respectively what is constitutive of the artwork.⁸² Even if the museum can reject an artist's ideas about what is

⁸⁰ See: Gover's “dual-intention theory of authorship” (Gover 2018, 30–6).

⁸¹ See: pages 37–8 of this thesis.

⁸² See, for instance, the case described by Joanna Phillips concerning the artwork *6th Light*, 2007 by Paul Chan. Initially, a conservator from the Guggenheim specified something that could be repeatedly observed in the artwork as one of its work-defining features. However, ultimately, this specification had to be rescinded since it was invalidated by Chan, who determined this feature as irrelevant to the artwork's constitution (Phillips 2012, 150–2).

constitutive of their artwork, this can be done only if there is sufficient evidence that these ideas are in disagreement with the artist's original decision-making.⁸³ In other words, for the museum to contest the validity of the artist's ideas, it has to refer back to the artist. Museum professionals have no freedom (and thus no authority) to *directly* determine what is constitutive of an artwork. Instead, they are in a position to establish what is constitutive of an artwork only *by proxy* and only with reference to the artwork and the artist.

D. The risks in approaching an artwork's identity as determined by the museum and malleable to its volition

As it has been already discussed in this thesis, instantiations of an artwork can vary significantly, without always reflecting the intent of the artist. Addressing these phenomena, conservation scholar Gunnar Heydenreich has commented that "different spatial and economic conditions, as well as the co-operation of exhibition organizers, artists and technicians, influence the appearance of the work at different venues" (Heydenreich 2011, 158). Similarly, Joanna Phillips has remarked that "the artist is rarely the sole decision-maker behind the appearance of an iteration, especially after the work enters a collection" (Phillips 2015, 169). Scholarship in the lines of Van Saaze interprets the phenomena described above as an artwork having plural and/or evolving identities, which are constructed and re-constructed by an extended network of stakeholders. Additionally, it is argued that the claimed plurality and mutability of the work is what museums need to honour, safeguard and make public.

At first glance, this might seem as a harmonious arrangement that honours a collaborative social order. However, I am concerned that from this perspective, which considers the identity of an artwork as being continuously reshaped by the museum's decisions and/or limitations, the artwork is ultimately equated with compromised instances and the artist's voice becomes all the more obscured. Most importantly, I sense a danger of canonising practices of institutional assimilation, offering museums the entitlement to interfere with personal expression and consequently with diversity. I want to suggest that what is ultimately at stake here is the dynamic between two distinct authorities, that of the individual (the artist) and that of the institution (the museum). In case of a conflict between the two parties, the conflict needs to be acknowledged and made visible. By declaring the artwork's identity as malleable to institutional volition, any potential conflict is just hidden from view, while the artist is stripped from artistic authority on the work that is presented as their own.

⁸³ See, for instance, the case with the National Gallery of Canada and artist Jana Sterbak (Irvin 2006, 154).

I would like to point to a different way of conceptualising the museum's influence in an artwork's change. First, I want to note, again, that change is not *ipso facto* antagonistic to a stable identity. Stephen Davies has pointed out with reference to living things that they "retain their identity though they change over time" and has convincingly argued that this also applies to artworks (Davies 2016 [2006]: 95). I embrace this perspective and I would like to discuss from this standpoint the museum's influence in an artwork's change. In the case where the variation is within the boundaries of what has been sanctioned by the artist as acceptable change, the variation is intrinsic to the artwork, so there is no ground for a discussion about the museum constituting the identity of the artwork. An artwork can defy notions of fixity in terms of its material make-up, and/or its mode of appearance, and/or the technologies it involves, however, this would alter its identity *only* if, for the specific artwork, it was a constitutive property that those need to remain fixed. In fact, the level and type of designated change that an artwork may undergo is part of the properties that define the identity of the work — it is not antagonistic to this work's identity. In the case where the artist is part of the museum's instantiation process, and the artist is not objecting to a change, it is the artist's non-objection that sanctions it as acceptable and determines it as relevant to the artwork's identity. Whereas, in the case where the variation falls outside the boundaries of what is sanctioned as acceptable change, the instance needs to be considered as not representative of the artwork and needs to be addressed as such.

Vindicating artist's sanction

This perspective is in agreement with Sherri Irvin's approach, according to which it is always and solely the artist's sanctions that determine the features of their artwork, so that no other stakeholders can determine the identity of an artwork (Irvin 2005). Irvin has variously illustrated and discussed in her work the ways in which museums and their representatives can play a central role in the artist's determination of sanctions.⁸⁴ For instance, she has shown how museum professionals are often the ones prompting artists to communicate their sanctions effectively, by involving them in the documentation of their work with interviews and questionnaires.⁸⁵ At the same time, she has discussed cases where artists are invited to take part in negotiations with the museum in order to adjust their artworks to institutional and/or

⁸⁴ See: Irvin 2005 and 2006.

⁸⁵ See, for instance: Irvin 2006, 145.

pragmatic constraints.⁸⁶ However, Irvin argues that only artists can determine sanctions about their artworks, and that, consequently, it is only artists who can cause a change to their artworks as an effect of modifying their sanctions.

From this perspective, stewards are not in a position to determine sanctions about the works in their care. In cases where stewards proceed unilaterally with decisions about a work's treatment or installation, which go against the artist's sanction, they do "jeopardise our access to the work" and mislead us as audiences — however, the work is not changed (ibid., 319). Irvin compares such unauthorised interventions with the calamity of a fire or with a poor restoration of a painting which "changes the object, but it does not change the artwork" (ibid.). These events are presented as factors that may influence an object's state "while remaining irrelevant to what the artwork is or how it should be viewed" (ibid., 318). In cases of conflict between what the artist has specified and what the museum adopts in the presentation of the work (or as Irvin puts it: cases where the museum violates some aspects of the artist's sanction), Irvin argues that museums have the responsibility to, first, make audiences aware that the given instantiation diverges from what the artist has sanctioned as constitutive of the artwork, and second, to inform them about how it diverges, so audiences can try to form an accurate understanding of the artwork (Irvin 2006, 151–2).

This theoretical perspective (which will also be operative in my analysis) accommodates the concerns from which the accounts of Tina Fiske and Vivian Van Saaze proceed, while still taking into due consideration the values museums claim to endorse as guardians of works of art. By investing on the idea that it is always and solely the artist's sanctions that determine the features of their artwork, while also highlighting the distinction between the artwork and its instances (the work as authored and the work as instantiated), it becomes possible to account both for the input of the artist and for the input of the steward. Most importantly, it becomes possible to *distinguish* between the input of the artist and the input of the steward, in this way honouring transparency, while also honouring accuracy.

A summary

This Chapter had two objectives. On the one hand, to explore different perspectives on what constitutes an ethical and effective museum practice for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks, including some key discussions on artist's intent and artwork's identity and different

⁸⁶ See, for instance, the case of *Time and Mrs. Tiber* (1976) by Liz Magor (Irvin 2005, 316–7).

theories concerning their institutional management. And, on the other hand, to illuminate what this thesis recognises as appropriate guiding principles for contemporary art stewardship.

In closing, I want to provide a very brief summary of the theoretical framework that has been outlined thus far and which will be operative in the analysis of the proceeding chapters. This thesis discusses the contemporary artwork as transgressing conventional barriers, being highly idiosyncratic, and embracing change in multiple and diverse ways. Considering what the focus for preservation efforts should be, the thesis aligns with conservation scholars who point towards the artwork's core identity as determined by the artist who authors the artwork. The thesis acknowledges that, in particular cases, the artist's sanctioning of the artwork's constitutive properties is a dynamic process and museum professionals can play a critical role in this process. With regard to changes that occur between instantiations, the thesis does not consider them as antagonistic to the protection of the work's identity, while the status of any physical elements is understood as being determined by what is relevant to the work's conceptual integrity.

Having identified in the Introduction the main characteristics of the artworks that this thesis focuses on and then, in this Chapter, what the thesis considers as the main principles appropriate to guide their stewardship, I will now proceed to the examination of the professional museum roles that are involved in this task: the role of Conservators, discussed in Chapter II, and the role Curators, discussed in Chapter III. The aim of this examination is to shed light on the ways in which museum professionals, entrusted with the task of stewardship, respond to this task in actual practice, and thus also on the attitudes or impediments or tensions that may undermine responsible stewardship.

Chapter II.

Conservators and the challenge of contemporary art: a varied approach

The complexity of contemporary art entails complex challenges for the professionals entrusted with the task of perpetuation of artworks: challenges that test traditional modes of operation and traditional conceptions of what responsible stewardship requires. Departing from a brief overview of the field of conservation up to the advent of contemporary art (§I), the aim of this Chapter is to present: (a) the ways in which the paradigm of contemporary art has challenged and reformed the practices of museum conservators (§II–§III); and (b) the internal tensions that accompanied such reform, as well as the shifts that it has brought about in the conservator's role (§IV). The Chapter will close with the examination of voiced concerns regarding the suitability of standard conservation training to the requirements of responsible contemporary art stewardship (§V).

I. From the origins of conservation to the challenge of contemporary art: a précis

Tracing the origins

The origins of conservation practice have been traced by some scholars in the early Neolithic (circa 7000 BC): in particular, in the first domestic acts of cleaning surfaces, repairing objects, preserving food by drying or salting, and in the ritual processes of mummification (Pye 2001, 39).⁸⁷ As human culture evolved, such practices were systematised, leading eventually to the emergence of “specialist” practitioners in Ancient Greece, who were entrusted with the treatment (i.e. the cleaning and restoration) of damaged artworks.⁸⁸ While restoration practice evolved in the ages that followed, still it remained experimental and unregulated at least until the Renaissance.

In light of this fact, other scholars argue that the origins of conservation practice should be linked not to types of activities —akin to those performed by conservators— but instead to the underlining principles that are deemed intrinsic to any act of conservation proper. Art

⁸⁷ See, also, Chris Caple making a reference to the research of Clare Hucklesby who sees a connection to conservation, for instance, in the ceremonial repainting of Aboriginal cave paintings (Caple 2010, 4).

⁸⁸ Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD) provided records of these practices and Catherine Sease refers to his writings as “the earliest written evidence of conservation of antiquities” (Sease 1996).

historian R. H. Marijnissen notes in this vein that early maintenance work failed to acknowledge the value of historicity, regarded as a fundamental principle in a conservation act;⁸⁹ while Salvador Muñoz Viñas traces the origins of conservation in the conceptualisation of the principle of “least possible interference” in the mid-18th century.⁹⁰

Early theorisation and regulation of the practice

Theorisation of the restoration and conservation practice emerged at the end of the Enlightenment.⁹¹ As the need for responsible and systematic practice became increasingly acknowledged and explored, the natural sciences came to be seen as a required direction for the conservation field. Scholars make special mention of the year 1888, when the chemist Friedrich Rathgen was appointed at the Koniglichen Museen, Berlin: this has been the first permanent appointment of a natural scientist in a museum’s restoration position.⁹²

The need to regulate restoration practices globally led the League of Nations⁹³ to devote an international conference on the subject (Plenderleith 1998, 134). The conference was held in Rome in 1930 and led to the publication of the *Manual of the Conservation and Restoration of Paintings* in 1939.⁹⁴ According to Pye (2001, 49), this publication marked a key moment for the field of conservation, as its title made a clear statement that “conservation was an activity distinct from, though closely related to, restoration”. From this time onwards, the landscape of conservation was to be radically reformed:⁹⁵ from being improvised and varied, the practice of conservation became regulated and systematic, while collective agency started replacing that

⁸⁹ R. H. Marijnissen notes that although maintenance work has always been carried out, the attitude in this type of processes has nothing to do with that of conservation and he opposes art historian’s Alois Riegl argument that conservation or protection of monuments (Denkmalpflege) began in the time of the Italian Renaissance. Marijnissen counterargues that the restorer-artist of that time “lacked the fundamental respect that dictates, above all, preservation of evidence of the past. He did not yet have the attitude of a historian, a paleographer, an archaeologist, a Bollandist, or even a learned person. He had not yet realized that a work of art is *also* a historical document” (Marijnissen 1996 [1963], 278).

⁹⁰ Muñoz Viñas sees this manifested, in exceptional cases, even in the eighteenth century and he makes particular reference to Pietro Edwards (1744–1821). He notes that in his treatise *Capitolato*, written in 1777, Edwards introduced many ideas that are still valid today, such as the principle that an inpainting should not extend beyond the lacuna that it was intended to cover. However, Viñas also adds that Edward’s theory “had not immediate consequences and remained an isolated case for some time” (Muñoz Viñas 2005, 3).

⁹¹ By scholar, such as: Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc; John Ruskin; William Morris; Alois Riegl; and, Camillo Boito.

⁹² See, for instance: Pye 2001, 45 and Hölling 2015, 5.

⁹³ An intergovernmental organisation, active between 1920 and 1944, that had as its principal mission maintaining world peace.

⁹⁴ Edited by Helmut Ruhemann, George Stout and Harold Plenderleith.

⁹⁵ In the same period took place the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments (Athens, Greece 1931), the findings of which were summarised in the key text *Athens Charter*.

of the individual. In the following decades, most of the major conservation organisations (still leading the field today) were established.⁹⁶ Already by mid-20th century, conservation was a fully institutionalised field that, without losing its pluralism, advocated transparency, internal and external dialogue and the sharing of research.

Within this climate of systematisation, sub-categories of expertise were devised in fine-art conservation, corresponding to different art media. However, the paradigm of contemporary art raised quite distinct challenges: by the 1990's, the discussion of what is expected by the conservator of contemporary artworks was well underway.

The traditional conservation paradigm and the challenges of contemporary art

Having as its exemplary object a relatively stable, concrete artwork —i.e. an artwork embodied in a fixed material medium (e.g. a painted canvas), having a privileged set of physical properties fixed at the time of its making,— conservation practice traditionally aimed at preserving the material make-up of the artwork and/or its privileged mode of appearance.⁹⁷ Traditional theories of conservation were similarly preoccupied, mainly or exclusively, with setting the principles of physical treatment of an artwork — as, for instance, those of *minimal intervention* and *reversibility*, which emerged at the end of 18th century and dominated conservation discourse for almost two centuries.⁹⁸

As already discussed in the previous Chapter, the traditional paradigm in conservation theory was challenged in the 1980s: a marked “communicative turn” in the relevant discourse⁹⁹ questioned the prominence of an artwork’s physical dimension and foregrounded *significance* as the main locus of importance — thus advocating the social character of the conservation discipline. This turn in conservation discourse is reflected in Getty Institute’s publication *Values and Heritage Conservation* as follows:¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ The Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique — IRPA- KIK), was founded in Belgium in 1948. The International Institute for Conservation of Historic Objects and Works of Art (IIC) was created in 1950. The Institute of Conservation (ICON), that was originally named UKIC and was part of IIC, was established in UK in 1953. The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) was established in 1959. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) - Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC) was established in 1967 (ICOM having been founded in 1946). The Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) was created in 1972. The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) was established in 1985.

⁹⁷ When referring to traditional conservation here, a reference is made also to restoration, which was the overarching term until 1950's. At that point, the term conservation became institutionally endorsed, also, by the establishment of the International Institute for Conservation of Historic Objects and Works of Art (IIC), an organisation that is still at the forefront of conservation research internationally.

⁹⁸ See: Muñoz Viñas 2005, 2.

⁹⁹ See: Muñoz Viñas 2005, 147–70.

¹⁰⁰ “Cultural significance is the term that the conservation community has used to encapsulate the multiple values ascribed to objects, buildings, or landscapes” (Avrami et al. 2000, 7).

The ultimate aim of conservation is not to conserve material for its own sake but, rather, to maintain (and shape) the values embodied by the heritage [...] We have come to recognise that conservation cannot unify or advance with any real innovation or vision if we continue to concentrate the bulk of conservation discourse on issues of physical condition. (Avrami et al. 2000, 7)

Despite such theoretical proclamations, the shift of focus in conservation discourse, from physicality towards significance, is far from being universally endorsed and applied.¹⁰¹ A factor that influences negatively the concretisation of this shift is pragmatic: the status of the artwork as a commodity that bears an economic value naturally privileges an interest in the maintenance of its physical condition.

When it comes to contemporary art, however, a reconceptualization of the aims and practices of conservation seems to be enforced: one of the marks of this artistic paradigm is repudiation of material fixity in favour of physical variability. The physical variability of contemporary art is manifested in different ways: it is manifested in artworks that incorporate materials that are perishable; in artworks that interact with the exhibition space almost in the manner of a choreography; in artworks that do not prescribe a fixed arrangement of their elements in space; in artworks that require close engagement rather than a distant (visual or aural) appreciation of their physical properties; in artworks that can involve intricate material constructions but which, at the same time, offer no tangible material to be stored after their initial installation; in artworks that involve—and often incorporate—technologies destined to become obsolete; and, finally, in artworks that manifest themselves in an oscillating status between performative act and material object.¹⁰²

To make manifest the need for a reconceptualization of conservation practice in relation to contemporary art (or else, the unsuitability of the traditional paradigm), it would help to consider the way in which the conservator's identity is currently defined by the International Council of Museums - Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC):

¹⁰¹ “The greater part of all conservation research still focuses on the challenges of physical condition—namely, the deterioration of materials and possible interventions—concentrating on the objects as opposed to their contexts” (Avrami et al. 2000, 5).

¹⁰² For instance: *Bitch*, 1995, by artist Sarah Lucas; *Le Musée qui n’existait pas* (The Museum That Did Not Exist), 2002, by artist Daniel Buren; *204 Somerset beach stones in 17 lines of 12 stones*, 1972–1973, by artist Richard Long; *Delineator*, 1974–1975, by artist Richard Serra; *Wall Drawings*, by artist Sol LeWitt; *Monument 1 for V. Tatlin*, 1964, by artist Dan Flavin; *Moon is the oldest TV*, 1965, by artist Nam June Paik; and, *Iriguchi* (Entrance), 1955, by artist Saburo Murakami.

[The] person educated in conservation and restoration technics and ethics, who is responsible for maintaining objects in as stable a condition as possible, so that they remain accessible as long as possible and still represent the meaning attributed to the objects.¹⁰³

In this statement, accessibility to meaning is directly associated with the object's stable condition — an axiom that constitutes an oxymoron in the case of many contemporary artworks. For instance, consider the work *Strange Fruit (For David)*, 1992–1997 by Zoe Leonard. This work features a series of eaten fruits that had their skins sewed back by the artist to an uncut wholeness. It is telling that, when the artist was faced with the choice of having her sculptures scientifically treated in order to be preserved for the future, she decided that she had to let them decay to the level of material disappearance in order for the work to retain its meaning.¹⁰⁴ Curator Ann Temkin remarked in relation to this work: “What did the museum’s conservators think? Indeed, the piece is a bit of an affront to the whole profession” (Temkin 1999, 49). Conservation scholar Pip Laurenson offers a rational response to the noted challenge: since there is a shift in the nature of the artworks that conservators work with, there needs to be an analogous shift of focus in conservation research and practice (Laurenson 2006, 9).

But how, and to what extent, is this shift of focus evidenced in the actual research and practice of conservation? And how do practitioners themselves conceive of the challenges they are faced with and the ways in which they address those challenges? Departing from the exemplary paradigm of Time-Based Media (TBM) artworks, in the following sections I will explore these issues, drawing on the relevant literature but also on the practitioners’ own insights, as expressed in a series of interviews conducted for this purpose.

II. Tracing the shift in conservation practice: the paradigm of TBM conservation

TBM is an area of artistic practice that has attracted extensive attention from the conservators of contemporary art. Before I proceed, it is important to explain what I understand as TBM

¹⁰³www.icom-cc.org/330/about-icom-cc/what-is-conservation/conservation:-who,-what-and-why/#.WSW25sbaEhd [accessed 10 May 2019].

¹⁰⁴ See: Ann Temkin 1999, 47.

artworks, as one can trace different categorisations in the relevant literature.¹⁰⁵ In line with Pip Laurenson,¹⁰⁶ in what follows I shall take the term “[to] refer to works that incorporate a video, slide, film, audio or computer-based element” (Laurenson 2006, 1).

Museums, in both Europe and USA, started collecting TBM works already in the early 1970’s.¹⁰⁷ The particular challenges that such works presented to collecting institutions became an important force of change for the conservation profession. Owing to the fact that the technologies used in such works can become obsolete, TBM artworks need to be attended constantly and in rather technical ways, or else they will perish along with their employed technologies. The new museum species thus disrupted conservator’s well-regulated working practice, shook their confidence and pushed urgently for adjusting actions.

Different institutions and individual practitioners dealt with the issue in their own ways. However, if we consider their responses to the TBM challenge collectively, we can trace five novel directions in the conservation profession: (a) practitioners working with their institutional colleagues from other disciplines in a closer synergy; (b) practitioners cooperating with each other across institutions and geographies, creating lasting networks of support; (c) practitioners reaching out to diverse fields and different professionals, in order to make use of their expertise and methodologies; (d) practitioners retraining; and (e) practitioners turning to theories that were new to conservation, in order to develop conceptual frameworks appropriate to the TBM paradigm. We need to consider these five directions in more detail, to understand how TBM artworks affect the conservation profession.

Collaboration with institutional colleagues

The different professionals in a museum environment, although sharing their overarching goals, often work in isolation: that is, they are engaged in their individual tasks that, when completed, promote the shared goal — like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. Conservators, in particular, are traditionally understood as being primarily engaged in bench and/or lab practice,

¹⁰⁵ For instance, for the Hirshhorn Museum (Washington DC, USA) TBM includes “film, video, digital, audio, computer-based, web-based, performance, and installation art.” See: <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/conservation/> [accessed 10 May 2019].

¹⁰⁶ The particular definition is chosen based on the fact that it appears in the article that introduced the leading conceptual framework for TBM conservation.

¹⁰⁷ In 1972, Tate Gallery (London, UK) accessioned its first three videos works: *A Portrait of the Artists as Young Men* (1970), *Gordon’s Makes Us Drunk* (1972) and *In the Bush* (1972) by Gilbert and George (Laurenson 2005, 263 and Horowitz 2014, 48). MoMA (NY, USA) began collecting TBM with the collection of artists’ videos in 1975, two of the first works acquired being *Now* (1973) by Lynda Benglis and *Vertical Roll* (1973) by Joan Jonas (Butler and Schwartz, 2010, 356).

i.e., in (usually) one-person activities that require concentration and isolation.¹⁰⁸ The TBM challenge was to change this state of affairs. Conservation scholar Jill Sterrett recalls, for instance, how it raised the need to come closer with her institutional colleagues at SFMOMA, in order to share anxieties and collectively search for solutions: the sought exchange happened in regular meetings that were soon defined as the Team Media meetings.

It was right when we moved into the Botta building¹⁰⁹ and it was three people. It was one registrar, it was one exhibition tech (the guy who installed the exhibitions), and myself. And it started because we were really nervous about how we were acquiring certain things and didn't know... We weren't doing anything that needed to be done. So, you can imagine, here I am, paper and photo [conservator], I don't have any expertise in this, you know... Bob Riley was the media curator at the time. So, he was acquiring things and they were coming into the collection. But, if we brought a painting in, there was a sort of confidence that we had in what we were doing. And then, there is that [media artworks]. "What are we doing?" So, it turned out that the three of us shared the same anxiety. And we thought: "well what if we just meet, and let's just figure out how we can be company to each other" (Theodoraki and Sterrett 2018)

The cross-departmental meetings that Sterrett instinctively initiated in 1995 soon became an important regular event in the SFMOMA calendar: an event "where staff from all over the museum with media-related interests—curators, conservators, technicians, intellectual property managers, registrars, and members of the web and digital team—come together to discuss matters in media art" (Westbrook 2016). In 2018 (when I worked at SFMOMA as a Visiting Scholar), the meetings were still taking place every month, while participation was raised from three individuals to an average of twenty for each session.

SFMOMA Team Media meetings have gained a distinguished reputation within the TBM conservation field: it is thus not uncommon for professionals from different museums to

¹⁰⁸ For instance, Jill Sterrett has noted: "In school we were taught that you sat down in a solitary way, examined your object, analyzed its materials, and then came up with a proposal, which was a solution that allowed for maximal preservation of this object" (GCI 2009).

¹⁰⁹ There are conflicting accounts locating the first meetings either in 1994 or in 1995 (see: Westbrook 2016; and, Sterrett and Coddington 2017). Based on Sterrett's recollection that meetings started while the Museum was located at the Botta building, the initiating year of Team Media will be noted in this text as 1995.

visit SFMOMA, in order to have a first-person experience of the meetings, with the prospect of initiating analogous events in their institutions.¹¹⁰

Professional networks and cross-institutional collaborations

The participation of professionals from different museums in the Team Media meetings attests to the formation of networks among conservation professionals, with the aim of tackling the TBM challenges collaboratively. As practitioners seek to learn from each other, knowledge and experience are shared with openness, generosity and trust. Pip Laurenson's own response to the TBM challenge has been indicative of this trend. In 1996, in a key moment for TBM conservation, TATE Gallery hired Pip Laurenson as Sculpture Conservator for Electronic Media — the first ever TBM conservator worldwide. Previous to this appointment, Pip Laurenson had a two-year internship (1992–1994) in sculpture conservation at Tate, as a Henry Moore Foundation intern. Laurenson notes that she became interested in TBM conservation when Tate acquired (in 1993, i.e., during her internship) Bruce Nauman's *Violet Incident* (1986)¹¹¹: “When I began to work on this acquisition, I realised that we didn't really have a plan regarding how best to deal with such works. That's how my research started and I was lucky enough to win a travel scholarship from the Gabo Trust.”¹¹² The Gabo travel scholarship enabled Laurenson to visit the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) (NY, USA), Whitney (NY, USA) and SFMOMA, to research how these institutions were dealing with TBM challenges. Laurenson returned to SFMOMA for a six-month residency in 2001, in order to study the Team Media by participating in their meetings and regular operations.

The sharing of knowledge and expertise appears to be continuous within TBM conservation. Conservation scholar Glenn Wharton recalls, for instance, that, when first confronted with the TBM challenge,¹¹³ he “had no place to turn other than Pip [Laurenson]” so he “did go to London and hang out at her lab and learned about all her procedures.” (Theodoraki and Wharton, 2006). However, beyond the networks that are built on a personal level among

¹¹⁰ During one of the Team Media meetings I participated in, three professionals from LACMA were visiting SFMOMA: the Digital Preservation Manager in the Collection Information and Digital Assets Department (CIDA) and Head of the Time-Based Media Committee; the Media Collection's Manager; and the Mellon Fellow in objects conservation.

¹¹¹ For information about the artwork visit: www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nauman-violent-incident-t06732 [accessed 10 June 2019].

¹¹² See: www.scart.be/?q=en/content/interview-pip-laurenson-tate [accessed 15 May 2019].

¹¹³ Wharton first joined MoMA in 2005 with a two-year consulting contract, with the task of establishing the conservation program for media and performance art. In 2007 he was hired in the museum as the Time-Based Media Conservator, the first ever to have officially this role in USA.

practitioners, different official networks have been created to support TBM conservation through cross-institutional collaborations. We can briefly consider three paradigmatic cases, in order to gain a sense of the aims and operations of such endeavours.

The Electronic Media Group (EMG)¹¹⁴ was established in 1996, as a specialty group within the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC). The aim of EMG is to organise meetings, events and conferences; to produce publications; to share practical tools and advice through a community-maintained wiki; to offer an online resource to literature and conference presentations; and, since 2000, to provide technical workshops for media preservation through TechFocus.¹¹⁵

The New Art Trust (NAT) was founded in 1997 by the collectors Pamela and Richard Kramlich¹¹⁶ in partnership with MoMA, SFMOMA and Tate, as a way to support research and practice relative to the perpetuation of TBM artworks.¹¹⁷ The trust performs joint research and owns artworks that were donated to the Trust by the collectors. As noted in an SFMOMA press release, the NAT initiatives address the fact that “traditional boundaries among collecting institutions are often counterproductive when it comes to electronic art forms”.¹¹⁸

Finally, the Variable Media Initiative (soon after, the Variable Media Network (VMN)) was established in 1999 at the Guggenheim, envisioned and led by Guggenheim curator Jon Ippolito. VMN is distinctive, to the extent that it resists the fragmentation of the contemporary art perpetuation discourse in a material/medium type of way: it aims rather to address the challenge of contemporary art more broadly as one of *variability* — a challenge that does not concern solely TBM works. As declared by VMN, its aim is to deliver “a ground-breaking methodology, which seeks to define acceptable levels of change within any given art object and documents ways in which a sculpture, installation, or conceptual work may be altered (or not) for the sake of preservation without losing that work’s essential meaning.”¹¹⁹

These three cases are, I trust, indicative of the aims and operations of the numerous cross-institutional and international initiatives, established in order to support the development of the

¹¹⁴ See: www.culturalheritage.org/membership/groups-and-networks/electronic-media-group [accessed 1 May 2019].

¹¹⁵ See: <http://resources.conservation-us.org/techfocus/> [accessed 1 May 2019].

¹¹⁶ The couple had bought their first work, the video *The Way Things Go* (1987) by Peter Fischli and David Weiss, back in 1987 (Lubow 2019).

¹¹⁷ In 2003 NAT and its partner museums initiated the project Matters in Media Art with the aim to develop agreed stewardship methodologies to be shared publicly online, supporting the practice of TBM artists and collectors and instigating further discourse.

¹¹⁸ See: www.sfmoma.org/press/release/new-art-trust-expands-holdings-with-important-new/ [accessed 1 May 2019].

¹¹⁹ See: www.guggenheim.org/conservation/the-variable-media-initiative [accessed 2 May 2019].

conservation profession *vis-à-vis* the challenges of TBM works and contemporary art more broadly.

Retraining

In a 1997 lecture, part of the *MAHC* conference, conservation scholar Derek Pullen pondered whether dealing with TBM “is fundamentally different or just an extension of existing conservator skills and responsibilities”; and, importantly, whether it requires a real expertise in new technologies (Pullen 2005 [1999], 301). Soon after (in 1999), the Bern University of the Arts (Switzerland) established a four-year diploma curriculum that included a two-year specialisation in modern materials and media conservation, thus addressing the need for training on the conservation of media artworks.¹²⁰ In a relevant interview, conservator Christine Frohnert described how she decided to study in Bern University of the Arts, while holding the position as the Head of the Conservation Department at Museum Ludwig (Cologne, Germany):

In 2000, I became head of the conservation department at Museum Ludwig, which was also home to about 550 media-based artworks at this point in time. So, together with my colleagues, I was responsible for those works as well, without having received any formal training in it. Just imagine myself, standing in front of the *Brandenburger Gate* by Nam June Paik, which is composed of 215 CRT monitors and a 5-channel video installation. I was scratching my head and asking myself “how could my skillset possibly translate into the care of those works?” And this is when I learned about the program that became available in Bern in Switzerland... A couple of years earlier, [1998] I was traveling with a light kinetic interactive installation by Robert Rauschenberg called *Soundings* (1968). I was installing it during the Rauschenberg retrospective on all four venues and this installation is actually picking up sounds through microphones and splitting it into four frequency points. So, if the spectator is talking to the piece, it is responding to each voice differently, so the artist really wanted to create an awareness that the artwork is responding to each visitor individually. In order to do so, you really have to make sure that the wiring is absolutely precise, you have to make sure that you really know how to put this installation together in every single detail. And during

¹²⁰ See: <https://vimeo.com/281796519> [accessed 2 May 2019].

installation and de-installation of the piece, I just realised that just a confusion of one little connection of one cable can completely destroy the sensitivity of that piece and this is when I got fascinated with TBM because I got aware of the fact that those artworks are so extremely sensitive and they need our care. So, this is when I realised there is such a need and if *we*, as conservators, don't gain the training necessary to care for these works, then they will be lost. That was the motivation. (Theodoraki and Frohnert 2016)

Reaching out

Even in cases where practitioners have received specialised training, the technical complexities of TBM artworks have pushed conservators to seek expertise outside their field and to form collaborations with various non-museum professionals.¹²¹ According to Glenn Wharton, for instance, the aim of developing a trusted repository for the management of digital assets, motivated his team to collaborate with “people from library and archives to model what a museum repository would look like” (Theodoraki and Wharton, 2016). Christine Frohnert, on the other hand, while responding to the challenges of computer and software-based works, sought the collaboration of a computer scientist, in order to analyse and interpret a code and to “loo[k] at techniques that have been developed in digital forensics” (Theodoraki and Frohnert 2016).

The need to reach out to experts beyond the museum requires that conservators have strong collaboration skills. It can also require that they act in a manner similar to that of a project manager or, as Derek Pullen has remarked, of a “diplomat and teacher,” — since often external collaborators will not have a concept of conservation ethics and conservators will have to find ways to defend such ethics to them (Pullen 2005 [1999], 300).

Turning to new theories

Since the mid 90's there has been a considerable production of publications by professionals involved in the perpetuation of TBM, where they present case-studies and reflect on challenges, rationales and methodologies. Amongst these works, there are notably some that discuss TBM

¹²¹ For instance, Guggenheim's list of potential collaborators includes amongst others: media technicians, video engineers, programmers, film-lab professionals and service technicians. See: www.guggenheim.org/conservation/time-based-media [accessed 5 May 2019].

issues also from a theoretical perspective, introducing to the discourse concepts that can allow a better grasp of the noted challenges — as for instance the concept of *institutional memory*, in J. Graham and J. Sterrett’s article “An Institutional Approach to the Collections Care of Electronic Art” (1997).

As discussed in detail in the previous Chapter, almost ten years later, Pip Laurenson (2006) explored issues of authenticity by introducing in the TBM conservation discourse theories from the philosophy of music. Laurenson highlights as the distinctive challenge of TBM artworks the fact that their perpetuation requires a type and level of intervention on their material make-up that clashes with the codes of ethics that conservators traditionally abide by. In response, she proposes a conceptual framework that —although it diverges from traditional conservation norms— is philosophically justifiable and can thus support a consistent perpetuation approach. Although the proposed framework concerned primarily the conservation of TBM installations, Laurenson notes in closing that she “would hope that aspects of this framework will also fit with a wider range of conservation objects” (Laurenson 2006, 11).

Concluding note: from TBM to contemporary art

Departing from Laurenson’s latter remark and the relevant approach of VMN (discussed earlier in this section), one can rightly ponder whether the challenges raised by TBM artworks are any different than the challenges raised by contemporary art as a whole. VMN’s reasoning suggests a negative answer to this question: ultimately, it is variability that is challenging and variability (even though it may be expressed in different ways) concerns the whole domain of contemporary art rather than just TBM. Jill Sterrett confirms this line of thought, extending to the broader domain of contemporary art the museum measures and methodologies used for TBM artworks:

I think within contemporary art we need a whole bunch of experts. We need Martina,¹²² we need Mark Hellar...¹²³ But, I don’t think that [a work by] Rein Jelle Terpstra, just because it’s sitting in the photography department, is asking anything different. In fact, I don’t think that [a work by] Felix Gonzales Torres, even though

¹²² Sterrett refers here to Martina Haidvogel, at the time SFMOMA Associate Media Conservator.

¹²³ Mark Hellar is a digital media and multimedia art expert and has a long collaboration with SFMOMA as a technology consultant.

there is no TBM involved at all, is asking for something different. There is a piece by Barry McGee that we acquired in 2006 and it's 300 found photographs and drawings of his and he is a graffiti artist. And he tags the wall before it goes up and then he hangs all these. We put it up four or five times now and it's dramatically different every time. I mean, I am not kidding you, *dramatically different*, not only does he tag the wall differently, but he installs all the pieces differently. [Originally] we've acquired 300 [pieces], and sometimes he brings extra ones that we don't acquire, and sometimes he brings extra ones that we do acquire, sometimes he comes in and steals things... Sometimes they are flat on the wall and sometimes he has stacked all of them so they become sculptural... If you think about that piece, where there is no TBM, you are actually using a lot of the same thinking as you would about something that has to migrate from a space to different technologies, to a different venue, that kind of variability. (Theodoraki and Sterrett 2018)

In the relevant interview, Sterrett explained that TBM has always been at the “vanguard”, like a “sandbox” where one could test new approaches, while “all the more traditional media have had to catch up” (ibid.). She noted, in particular, that curators at SFMOMA (not part of Team Media) often turned to Team Media in order to find solutions for complex artworks that, although they did not involve TBM, still challenged all their familiar strategies for accession and long-term care. Team Media had developed the methodologies and experience to devise an appropriate strategy for such works. In a concluding remark, Sterrett delineates the foundational element of the strategy proper to TBM and to contemporary art more widely:

Early on I would have said ‘oh, Team Media can be the venue for everything media based,’ what became really clear is that that assumption only works if conservation is only based on technical terms. And of course, that's too simple, but we realized that the *decision-making around our preservation questions and solutions had all to do with the intent of the artist and their practice and what they were doing.* (ibid.)

As discussed in the previous Chapter, the *artist's intent* has been a core notion in contemporary art stewardship discourse. For practitioners, the strategic focus on the artist's intent dictates processes of extensive and thorough documentation: as is acknowledged in the relevant

literature, this is probably the biggest challenge facing the perpetuation of contemporary artworks, across media.

III. Conservators and the requirement for extended documentation

In the heritage discourse, documentation has been acknowledged as a key process in all types of conservation.¹²⁴ But, as Vivian Van Saaze notes, documentation has an even more crucial function in the case of contemporary art:

“An artwork’s visual and written documentation as a form of materialised memory is considered invaluable to its perpetuation. This is the case for traditional art objects, but even more so for complex, variable, contemporary artworks such as installations, conceptual art, and performance-based artworks, which fully rely on documentation for their future existence” (Van Saaze 2015, 56)

Documentation has indeed been at the centre of both academic and museum research on the collection, presentation and conservation of contemporary artworks. For instance, conservation scholar Jill Sterrett, while in the position of the Director of Collections at SFMOMA, stated that “[e]ffective documentation methods are the crux of what we’re trying to put in place” (GCI 2009). Of course, documentation (in the form of producing condition and treatment reports) has been part of the conservator’s practice even with regard to artworks from the traditional and modern paradigm. However, documentation of a contemporary artwork is a rather complex endeavour — one in which the description of the condition and physical treatment of hard matter is only of peripheral importance. Sterrett’s reference to required “effective documentation methods” targets such complexity.

In contemporary art conservation discourse, the issue of documentation has attracted considerable analysis.¹²⁵ In what follows I will examine three specific issues that, I believe, manifest the complexity of the endeavour: the first issue concerns the appropriate focusing points of documentation; the second issue concerns the suitable documentation tools and

¹²⁴ See, for instance: Matero 2000; CAC and CAPC 2000; E.C.C.O. 2003; Finn 2012; Saunders 2012; ICOM 2017, 14.

¹²⁵ See, for instance: Coddington 1999; Hess Norris 1999; Hummelen 1999 and 2005; Laurensen 2005 [1999]; Peek and Brokerhof 2005 [1999]; Weyer and Heydenreich 2005 [1999]; Hummelen and Scholte 2004; Baumgart 2011; Wagner 2011; Bek 2011; Heydenreich 2011; Matos et al. 2015. Marçal and Macedo 2017.

methods (especially, the artist's interview¹²⁶); and the third issue concerns who bears, or should bear, the responsibility of documentation.

The focusing points of documentation

If the documentation of contemporary artworks needs to expand to areas beyond the material make-up of the art object, what should those other areas be? This key question has been explored by different scholars.

From early on, the artist's intent was highlighted in the documentation discussion as the proper area of focus. Justin Graham and Jill Sterrett (1997) noted, for instance, that "the tangible materials of a piece are only as significant as the information regarding the look, 'feel' and intention of the piece, necessary to reconstruct it to a faithful state each time it is shown". In a similar vein, Debra Hess Norris (1999, 133) has argued that "[i]nstallation pieces, for example, require complete notes (often using photography and, at times, video) that carefully record materials, installation procedures, spatial relationships, and intent. Without this, intent would be lost and the piece would change dramatically from installation to installation." IJsbrand Hummelen and Tatja Scholte, on the other hand, have stressed that in the process of interpreting the artist's intent great attention should be given to the documentation of tacit knowledge and of the non-tangible (Hummelen and Scholte 2004, 208).

With regard to the overarching principles of this endeavour, the prevailing idea in the discourse is that documentation needs to be (a) *on-going*, acknowledging the changes that may occur among instantiations; as well as (b) *self-reflective*, acknowledging the role of subjectivity in the perpetuation processes.

Importantly, scholars stress that decision-making itself has to be "transparent and fully documented" (GCI 2009). In the previous Chapter, I discussed Sanneke Stigter and Joanna Phillips actively advocating the need for an on-going documentation which is self-reflective and traces the whole process of decision-making. Stigter stresses the need to record the conservator's personal input through the kind of autoethnographic account she terms "conservator's testimony" (Stigter 2015). Phillips points to the *Iteration Report* and notes that the documentation of decision-making serves "as a tool for institutional self-reflection, making current choices transparent to future interpreters, and thereby helping to prevent uninformed

¹²⁶ From this point onwards, for reasons of brevity, I will refer to the particular tool which is the 'artist's interview for conservation purposes' as the 'artist interview'.

and compromising realizations of an artwork” (Phillips 2015, 168). In her interview, Phillips described how this documentation approach functions in practice:

If there is a disagreement between the curatorial department and the artist, then, I will make a note on that, so future curators will look at the files and see: “maybe let’s not do it this way again because we already know that the artist didn’t like it”. What we are creating in conservation is a layered record of previous decision-makings so the future interpreter can understand how certain things had come about, and then base their decision-making on that, especially if the artist is not around anymore. That [record] is going to be so much more telling about how the artist reacts to proposals, than to just go by the artist provided installation instructions, because they are going to be super incomplete, they don’t take into account the changes that are due at the collection. The installation instructions happen at the beginning but then they become outdated really quickly. And that is why we want this history of back and forth to know better that: “there is all this nuance here, and there are preferences and second-best solutions and we made a compromise”. (Theodoraki and Phillips 2016)

Suitable documentation tools and methods: the artist’s interview

To return to documentation as primary research on the artwork and the proper methods to that end, the complexity of the issue is underscored as we acknowledge the variability of contemporary artworks: each artwork has unique characteristics and presents its own challenges, so the merited mode of documentation can vary among different artworks. The modes of documentation that are available in each case involve: producing technical instructions, diagrams and designs; research in archives and in literature; analysis of material and technical studies; photographic documentation of exhibitions and of individual elements; sound or video recorded interviews (of artists and/or collaborators); or, video recorded mock-up installations.

Acknowledging the complexities of documentation, different initiatives and institutions have developed a variety of templates and guides,¹²⁷ as organising tools to assist with

¹²⁷ See, for instance: *The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement*, developed in 1971 by curator Seth Siegelaub and lawyer Bob Projansky; the *Model for Data Registration* and the *Model for Condition*

performing and storing documentation. For the very same reason, the appropriateness of the available Collection Management Systems (CMS) has been under review,¹²⁸ while the role of the artist in the documentation of their work has already been studied at length.¹²⁹ Glenn Wharton has noted in that regard:

We have come a long way from the early minimalist artists in the 1960s and 70s who were transferring the rights to other people to recreate their works without thickly describing what that meant, and a lot hurt feelings and mistakes were made, and litigations occurred. But, I think, now, there is a better understanding with museum practice that the museum staff needs to sit down with the artist at the moment of acquisition, do the interview, fill out questionnaires, create an installation manual. If it is a performance, video the artist performing, video the artist training someone else to perform, video someone else performing it and you are building all of this documentation. (Theodoraki and Wharton 2016)

The artist's interview¹³⁰, to which Wharton points, has been singled out as a key documentation method for contemporary artworks since the 1990's.¹³¹ A significant number of initiatives promote it and the museums that are at the forefront of the contemporary art conservation discourse incorporate the procedure in their stewardship practice.¹³² A project that has been key to the promotion of the artist's interview as a vital method of documentation, was the launch of the influential Artists' Documentation Program (ADP) in 1990.¹³³ The project was initiated by conservation scholar Carol Mancusi-Ungaro and was launched at the Menil Collection (Houston, USA) with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It involved conservators (in most cases, Mancusi-Ungaro) conducting video recorded interviews of artists,

Registration, developed in 1999 by SBMK; the *Iteration* and *Media Reports*, developed as part of the Variable Media Initiative; and, the system developed through the Matters in Media Art Project.

¹²⁸ See, for instance: Ippolito 2008; Heydenreich 2011.

¹²⁹ See, for instance: Hummelen and Sillé 2005 [1999], 391–9; McCoy 2009; Huys 2011; Sommermeyer 2011.

¹³⁰ It is important to note that the process of collecting information from the artist as a reference for conservation did not begin with contemporary art. Different cases from the early 20th century have been discussed in literature: for instance, the case of artist and art theorist Max Doerner, who published his conducted surveys in 1921 in Germany; the questionnaires used by Committee of Paintings of the Community of Amsterdam; and the case of Ralf Mayer who published his conducted surveys in 1940 in USA. See, for instance: Cangia 2013.

¹³¹ See, for instance: Mancusi-Ungaro 2005 [1999]; Sturman 2005 [1999]; Petovic 2005 [1999]; Hermens 2005 [1999]; Peek and Brokerhof 2005 [1999]; Weyer and Heydenreich 2005 [1999]; Huys 2011.

¹³² See, for instance:

www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/interviews-artists-and-art-world-figures/conservation-interviews

[accessed 15 May 2018].

¹³³ For access to the project, visit: <http://adp.menil.org/> [accessed 10 April 2019].

with immediate reference to their artworks that were present in the space of the interview.¹³⁴ Following the ADP example, SBMK and RCE in the Netherlands initiated in 1998 the project *Artists' Interviews*; this was followed in 2001 by the *Artists' Interviews / Artists' Archives* project. Beyond the purpose of collecting information by the interviewed artists, the two Dutch projects aimed to function as wider research opportunities for the development of detailed guidelines for effective artist interviews.¹³⁵

INCCA (discussed in the introduction of this dissertation), one of the leading international organisations for the perpetuation of contemporary art, is also the leading organisation in the promotion of the artist's interview. Since its establishment in 1999, INCCA has had as one of its central aims the collection of information from artists or their representatives. In 2002 it published the *Guide to Good Practice - Artists' Interviews*, presenting the experience of almost one hundred interviews, which were conducted by its partners as part of its founding project (1999–2002).¹³⁶ Guided by the same aims, Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA) —the organisation that prior to 2015 was INCCA North America— has as part of its mission the training of museum professionals in artist's interviews.¹³⁷

Given the great significance of the artist's interview for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks, it is important to gain a good sense of the actual process within a museum set-up: in particular, it is important to gain a good sense of (a) the challenges that it may raise to those entrusted with the task and (b) the strategies developed to overcome these challenges. To this end, Appendix IV¹³⁸ presents a long excerpt of the interview of Joanna Phillips —a conservation scholar but also a professional at the forefront of TBM conservation,— where she reflects on her experience of artist's interviews at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (NY, USA).

Before we proceed, it is important to note an issue that arises in this context and which has been theoretically explored in the previous Chapter when discussing the role of the artist's intent in institutional decision-making. Although the artist's interview is widely regarded as

¹³⁴ In the project's website there are interviews of 40 artists, conducted in the period between 1991 and 2013. In three of the cases, the interviewee is not the artist but a different expert on their work.

¹³⁵ The guidelines *Concept Scenario Artist's Interviews* were produced in 1999 and are available at www.sbm.nl/source/documents/concept-scenario.pdf In 2012, an extended set of guidelines together with research texts based on the two projects were included in the publication of an informative book entitled "The Artist Interview. For conservation and presentation of contemporary art. Guidelines and practice", which functions as an artist's interview "handbook for conservators and curators" (Beerkens et al. 2012, 9).

¹³⁶ See updated version from 2016: www.incca.org/articles/incca-guide-good-practice-artists-interviews-2002 [accessed 20 May 2019].

¹³⁷ www.vocanetwork/programs/voca-workshops/ [accessed 10 May 2018].

¹³⁸ Page 189.

being of paramount importance for the aims of perpetuation of contemporary artworks, still there are concerns as to whether the artist's own reflections on their artwork should be taken into consideration unconditionally. It is noted, for instance, in Beerkens et al. (2012, 15) that "[t]he artist's information may be very important but it doesn't mean that his opinion should always be of overriding importance in the decision-making process about the conservation of his work". In a similar vein, Julia Giebeler and Gunnar Heydenreich (2016) note:

[A]rtists' interviews need to be contextualized and critically examined. Thus, we have to consider the time when the interview took place, the context of the interview, the intention of the interviewer etc. [...] [A]rtists' opinions are 'not set in stone' and can change over time. They cannot therefore serve as an unambiguous validation of the artist's intention. (Giebeler and Heydenreich 2016, 132–3)

Curator Nat Trotman, addressing the fact that artists may change their minds about their works, thus providing contradicting information, underlines the value of conducting an artist's interview at the point when a work is being acquired by the museum:¹³⁹

[I]t is the museum's job to hold the artist accountable as they change their mind about things. And to remind them of history and to make sure —as best as possible, through this interview process when you acquire a work— *to understand what the original intentions are, and to capture that as much as possible*. So that, as the artist's intentions changes over time, you can say "Before you say this, are you sure you are changing your mind?" I would not want to be in a position where I would say "Well, you can't change your mind," but, just to say "What about this? We need to talk this through, we can't just ignore this documentation that you've given us, we have to be responsible to it" and hopefully make the decisions like truly for reasons. (Theodoraki and Trotman 2018)

Nat Trotman and Joanna Phillips (quoted at Appendix IV) were colleagues at the Guggenheim Museum, when their interviews took place: Trotman in the position of Curator, Performance

¹³⁹ Similarly, conservation scholar Lydia Beerkens has noted: "There are obvious moments for an interview, for example during the purchase procedure or while preparing a major exhibition about the artist's work, but ideally, the artist should be approached at a time close after the creation of the artwork or prior to the acquisition of an artwork" (Beerkens et al. 2012, 11).

and Media; and Phillips in the position of Senior Conservator of Time-based Media.¹⁴⁰ For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to gain an insight on the ways in which the two professionals understood their respective roles in relation to the documentation process. More widely, it is important to consider how scholars address the distribution of the documentation responsibility.

Contemporary art documentation: whose responsibility?

Joanna Phillips, reflecting on her proactive attitude towards documentation, justified it on the grounds of the commitment that conservators feel towards keeping *evidence*.

We [the conservator's team at the Guggenheim] usually have the most overview of the pieces of information we have about the work, like correspondences that took places years ago, because we have this really thick file, so we can then say "oh, there is actually a conflict between what we are proposing here and what the artist said, the artist said the two videos should always be projected on the same wall but we are proposing to project it on opposing walls, what do we do about that?" *We need a discussion with the artist about that and that is often triggered by conservation because we want to have evidence.* Even if the artist says "yes, sure no problem" and it is never done like that before, we need the evidence in our files that "this is OK from now on". And that is why our identity reports grow over time because we learn more about the piece in every iteration. (Theodoraki and Phillips 2016)

Phillips, as quoted, presents documentation (including the artist's interview) as a responsibility of the conservator. Curator Nat Trotman confirmed that this was indeed the case at the Guggenheim:

¹⁴⁰ Nat Trotman has been employed by Guggenheim since 2001. Joanna Phillips started working in Guggenheim in 2008, and in 2019 she left the Museum to begin her position as the director of Restaurierungszentrum der Landeshauptstadt, Düsseldorf (the Restoration Centre of the City of Dusseldorf), a prestigious German institute which is one of the 11 organisations who founded INCCA in 1999 and one of the five organisers of the seminal 2004-2007 project *Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art*.

In collection care [which includes identifying the defining properties of an artwork]¹⁴¹ the curator's role is somewhat subsidiary to the conservator's role [...]. Not that the curator is uninvolved, but I think of that as being a task where the conservator takes the lead-on and the curator supports. (Theodoraki and Trotman 2018)

Based on the above, we can note that in the particular collaboration between a curator and a conservator,¹⁴² it was the conservator who was actually leading the documentation process. It is important to remark in this regard that Guggenheim is not the average museum: it is a leading museum in the contemporary art perpetuation discourse; and it is a leading museum in researching and promoting documentation methodologies, tailored to the challenges of contemporary artworks.¹⁴³ Further, it is important to observe that conservation in Guggenheim is highly regarded: this becomes evident just by browsing the Museum's website, where the conservation research conducted is thoroughly communicated,¹⁴⁴ and where all members of the conservation team are detailily presented — alongside, and in the same way, as the members of the curatorial team.¹⁴⁵

While the Guggenheim has developed state-of-the-art documentation methodologies and pioneering conservators are leading their implementation, the relevant literature reminds us that each museum is a different case and the artwork's documentation is not necessarily approached, or understood, as a process that is to be led by conservators. For instance, in the 2012 ICOM-CIDOC "Statement of principles of museum documentation," under the heading "Staffing and systems," it is stated:

¹⁴¹ See page 104.

¹⁴² The collaboration of the conservation and curatorial department is also evident by the fact that members of the two teams co-author articles and conference presentations. See for instance, the article "Reconstructing Brandon (1998-1999): A Cross-disciplinary Digital Humanities Study of Shu Lea Cheang's Early Web Artwork." (Engel et al. 2018) and the joint presentation by Joanna Philips and Lauren Hinkson *Collecting Live Performance at the Guggenheim Museum*, as part of the international symposium "Collecting and Conserving Performance Art," organised by the German Association of Conservator-Restorers (VDR), hosted at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (Germany), in June 2016 (presentation video available at: <https://vimeo.com/196611313> [accessed 1 June 2019]).

¹⁴³ Reference can be made, for instance, to VMN, discussed earlier in this Chapter, and to the contribution to the field by Lena (Carol) Stringari (Deputy Director and Chief Conservator and part of the Guggenheim team since 1992), one of the pioneers in the contemporary art conservation discourse. Stringari presented a very important lecture in the 1997 symposium *MAWC* (see: Stringari 2005 [1999]) and was one of the 23 members who founded INCCA in 1999 (see: www.incca.org/network-history [accessed 10 June 2019]).

¹⁴⁴ The "Conservation" page in the Guggenheim website (www.guggenheim.org/conservation [accessed 1 May 2020]) is one click away from the "Home" page and can be found under "Research." From there, there are links to various conservation projects and initiatives of the Museum.

¹⁴⁵ See: www.guggenheim.org/staff [accessed 1 May 2020].

“The museum must employ or have access to staff with appropriate expertise in documentation procedures, standards and systems (Code 1.14 and 8.11). In a small museum, this principle may be fulfilled by a curator with appropriate training, while in a large museum there may be one or more documentation specialists working in partnership with curators, conservators and information systems specialists (Code 1.15).”¹⁴⁶

Similarly, in the “Diagram of a cultural property ecosystem” created by Debra Hess Norris, “accurate documentation” is illustrated as a distinct responsibility for all the following parties: conservator/scientist; scholar/curator; artist; consumer/marketplace (Hess Norris 1999, 131). So, to conclude: although there are cases, such as the Guggenheim, where the responsibility for documentation of contemporary artworks is attributed primarily to the conservator, still no general claims can be made about the distribution of such responsibility across institutions. As it becomes clear in the following Chapter and with regard to the case of Tate Britain, neither in theory nor in practice can we find a unanimous, definite stance on who is, at least in principle, the primary bearer of this responsibility. In the domain of theory, there is an added dimension of complexity — one that concerns specifically conservators: if conservators are granted (whether solely or partly) the responsibility of documentation, how does that reflect on the conception of their role and their profession? When conservators are expected to track and safeguard an artwork’s identity through a copious documentation process, is this still conservation work proper? We need to consider how these challenging issues have been explored in the existing literature.

IV. The conservator’s role in contemporary art perpetuation: noted tensions, noted shifts

A certain uneasiness

Scholars that acknowledge documentation as clearly a conservator’s responsibility, also acknowledge that this entails a radical change in dominant conceptions of the conservator’s role. Vivian Van Saaze, for instance, argues that the contemporary artwork’s documentation

¹⁴⁶ See: http://cidoc.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/principles6_2.pdf [accessed 10 March 2021].

requirements enforce a re-conceptualisation of the conservator's role "from custodian to co-creator". She notes:

With contemporary art [...] the work of the conservator is considered to be more proactive, interpretative and creative in terms of knowledge production. Otherwise put: rather than merely *retrieving* documentation, the conservator is asked to play a role in *creating* documentation. This change requires a re-examination of the conservator's role as well as a more reflexive attitude towards tools and methodologies applied. In articles and research projects, conservators convey their uneasiness with their new role as co-creator and share concerns about issues of validation. (Van Saaze 2009c, 20–1)

Van Saaze's approach has been closely examined in the previous Chapter. It is, however, important to underline here Van Saaze's remark on conservators' uneasiness with the responsibilities of documentation. MoMA Chief Conservator, Jim Coddington, confirms such uneasiness: in particular, he expresses his concern that conservators' focus on documentation is putting their role at risk.

I can see a subgenre arising within conservation that is purely documentary. And I wonder if that is playing against something I see as *the field's bedrock, which is treatment*. There's obviously documentation as part of collection care, whether it's traditional conservation or media conservation. So documentation as a means has always been with us in modern conservation practice but not as an end. If we lose sight of *our defining purpose, treatment*, if that becomes secondary for some element of the profession, I worry that it's a kind of fundamental challenge. (Sterrett and Coddington 2017)

Coddington points to the threat of an arising documentation sub-genre within conservation, forcefully reminding his colleagues that the defining purpose of conservation is an artwork's treatment.¹⁴⁷ When he made these statements, Coddington had a 30 year-experience of working

¹⁴⁷ Coddington's point of view is in line with the way conservation is portrayed in MoMA's website, focused on physicality: "The Department of Conservation is responsible for the physical preservation of MoMA's collection in all mediums, and advises on environmental controls and needs; special exhibitions; and travel, packing, and installation requirements. These activities form an overall preventative program, which seeks to maintain the collection for future generations." See: www.moma.org/collection/about/ [accessed 10 July 2019].

in one of the most important modern and contemporary art collections globally (that of MoMA), while he had contributed significantly to the development and implementation of advanced methodologies for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks: such credentials give special weight to his opinion. However, not all scholars agree with this opinion: specifically, not all scholars agree that the conservator's defining purpose—even in the case of contemporary art—is *treatment* of an artwork. This important area of debate needs to be considered in more detail.

A debated identity

Conservation scholar Elizabeth Pye remarks poignantly on the diversity of guiding aims within conservation:

Within the field of conservation, practitioners do not necessarily agree on what its key functions should be (or even whether it is grounded in art or science); in fact, conservation draws on many different traditions and make use of skills and technics developed in a range of different fields. Reflecting on these different traditions shows why it has taken some time to begin to develop an agreed purpose, or clear identity. (Pye 2001, 37)

Pye's remark on the lack of clear identity in the conservation field does not concern specifically contemporary art conservation: with regard to this paradigm, her remark would gain extra force, given the increased documentation needs of contemporary artworks. Humanities and social sciences would then need to be added as further possible grounds of the field's key functions, next to those of "art" and "science"; while, next to the different skills and technics that conservators employ, one would need to add the different mindsets with which they approach the documentation tasks. From this standpoint, the conservation discipline appears to be not so much *diverse* (since it doesn't seem to function as a harmonious co-operating system), as *fragmented*, given that there are multiple accounts of expressed antagonism and discord. For instance, the practices in which conservators of contemporary art are involved are sometimes disputed by fellow conservators as not relevant to the discipline. Such disputes make manifest the lack of consensus among conservators on the jurisdiction of their role and, more importantly, on the overall purpose of the profession. In a published exchange with other

museum professionals, concerning the stewardship requirements of contemporary art and how they can challenge and shape conversation practice, Jill Sterrett comments:

I'm sure you all have heard it, too—"Well, that's not proper conservation." Increasingly I scratch my head and think, "What does 'proper' conservation mean anymore?" We have colleagues who can answer that question very clearly for themselves. And I get the feeling that it has to do with sitting at the bench and inpainting. Outside that definition, it's something else—but not conservation (GCI 2009).

Glenn Wharton outlines the same sort of conflict within the conservation field:

I think that many conservators of contemporary art are working more intellectually. And there is some conflict within our field among conservators who don't understand what we are doing or why we are doing it. One conservator at the MET, not too long ago, said "Why would you interview an artist? Isn't that the curator's job or the art historian's job to mediate what the artist would want?" and I said "Well, in an installation, if you take everything down and throw it away when the installation is over, don't you think we need to document what the artist would want next time we install it?" And he said "Oh I never thought about that!" It is, just, that he is functioning in a different world. [...] I think there would be people who say that I really stepped out of conservation practice. (Theodoraki and Wharton 2016)

Sterrett and Wharton both point to the lack of mutual understanding between conservators who have experience of working with contemporary artworks and conservators who lack such experience. However, there are signs of yet another kind of incongruity — one that is more subtle and can go unnoticed: amongst the conservators who are involved in the conservation of contemporary art and in documentation practices, there seem to be clashing conceptions of their role in the broader mission of an artwork's perpetuation. To illustrate this point, I will present a particular example.

In an article about artists' interviews and their use in conservation, Sabine Cotte, Nicole Tse and Alison Inglis note that "[u]sing the conservator's eye to read an artist's oeuvre in their presence is like travelling together from the materials to the finished works" (Cotte et al. 2017,

109). We understand that, through their involvement in the documentation process, these conservators aim to map the past of the finished work —i.e., to track the creative process, — as indeed they explain in the following excerpt:

[Conservators] aim to understand how the work is made, what the material is and the way it has been prepared, treated, manipulated and materially transformed. Conservators tend to recreate the stages of making conceptually, in order to gain a better understanding of the final work of art, how it conveys meaning and how it can best be conserved through time. This depth-to-surface approach, which characterizes the conservation profession, is based on a sound knowledge of materials and often resonates strongly with those artists who physically engage with materials to create works of art. A conservator interviewing an artist on this topic can create a sense of complicity around the act of making things, which helps uncover further details of the creative processes. (Cotte et al. 2017, 108–9)

Pip Laurenson expresses a radically different conception of the process and its aims: she describes the conservator’s discussion with the artist as an opportunity for “laying a kind of blueprint about the *imagined future* of [a] work” (Theodoraki and Laurenson 2018). In other words, where the approach of Cotte et al (2017) privileges the work’s past, Laurenson’s approach is forward looking — i.e., the processes of documentation, from her perspective, are geared towards the work’s imagined future. For Laurenson, this is the distinctive and valuable contribution of conservation when it comes to works of contemporary art:

What I am very interested in, at the moment, is this idea of conservation being very focused on imagined futures of artworks. I think this is something that distinguishes the way in which conservators think compared with, for example, a historian [...] It may be about understanding pathways to deterioration in that kind of collection [...] It may be about trying to understand what it is you are trying to preserve about a complex kind of performance and imagining future possible manifestations of that work. It is a certain form of knowledge production, which I think is distinct to that profession, I am not saying there aren’t elements of thinking about the future of artworks that might also be explored by a curator or an art historian, but it is not really their territory [...] I think conservators have extraordinary skills that are still very important in terms of being able to respond to the material parts of an artwork.

But I think for contemporary art conservation they also have skills which are around facilitating certain types of discussions and I think, that in a way, what distinguishes the focus of conservation is about this imagined future. (Theodoraki and Laurenson 2018)

So, to conclude, although the discussed practitioners all work with contemporary artworks and artist's interviews and all participate in the same discourse, still their expressed views on their roles are quite at odds: in the one case, the conservator is presented as someone who maps the past of the "finished" artwork, focusing on artists' materials and their transformation; whereas in the other case, the conservator is presented as someone who co-designs the *future* of an artwork's evolution, without having declared any particular commitment towards materials. This example is indicative of the tensions that might exist among individual conceptions of the conservator's role and aims in the case of contemporary art (even among professionals/scholars that do acknowledge the work's perpetuation as mainly a conservator's responsibility). We need to read beyond these tensions, to trace the deeper shifts that contemporary art has brought to the conservator's role.

Traced shifts

Beyond the debates concerning the conservator's role, it is acknowledged in the relevant literature that the complexity of contemporary art perpetuation merits and/or already has brought significant shifts in the role of the conservator.

One such shift concerns the rise of *subjectivity*. Although conservators traditionally turned to hard science in their striving for objectivity, in relation to the paradigm of contemporary art their role seems to involve a pronounced element of subjective interpretation.¹⁴⁸ Conservator Barbara Sommermeyer remarks, for instance, that "the conservator is the critical interpreter of all information that the artwork and its context provide after it has been created" (Sommermeyer 2011, 150). As the subjective element in conservator's practice is acknowledged, the need for *reflexivity* becomes all the more pronounced.¹⁴⁹ As noted earlier, Sanneke Stigter (one of the most adamant advocates of reflexivity) insists that conservators need to remain critical of their personal involvement; to

¹⁴⁸ See, for instance: Sommermeyer 2011; Jadzińska 2011; Van Saaze 2011a; Noordegraaf 2015.

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance: Hummelen and Scholte 2004; Hill Stoner 2005; Macedo 2006; Laurenson 2006.

this end, the autoethnographic method she proposes supports “a conscious elucidation of decisions and alternatives, driven by questioning the approach that is personally pursued” (Stigter 2016a, 231).

Another important shift was discussed earlier and concerns conservators’ outreach. Different scholars conceptualise this shift in different ways. Cultural heritage consultant Marta De La Torre ponders whether “the conservation professional’s role has become that of an orchestrator of specialists” (De La Torre 2002, 4). Conservation scholar Glenn Wharton and sociologist Harvey Molotch similarly reflect upon the idea of the conservator as a “coordinator” (Wharton and Molotch 2009, 219). Scholar of cinema studies and digital preservation Howard Besser refers to conservators as in need of “the combined skills of archivists and cultural anthropologists” (Wharton 2005, 170). Conservation scholars Rita Macedo, Andreia Nogueira and Hélia Marçal position the conservator as a historiographer or performer (Macedo et al. 2012). While Jill Sterrett has remarked that “[c]onservation has always called for analytical thinking, but now we’re looking for abstract thinkers who are comfortable synthesizing solutions. Rather than master practitioners, we’re looking for people who are master facilitators in many ways.” (GCI 2009).

A further shift concerns the turn of attention from the concrete (the artwork’s material) to something that is rather more abstract — the artwork’s essence or identity. Conservator Reinhard Bek remarks, for instance, that “researchers and decision-makers must possess a capacity for empathy and abstraction with regard to the essence of the work above and beyond its material existence” (Bek 2011, 211). Conservators Anne van Grevenstein and Mikkel Scarff also note the conservators’ shift of focus from materials towards what is abstract (such as ideas) but, moreover, stress that this shift “necessitates an adjustment of traditional conservation ethics” (Grevenstein and Scharff 2005 [1999], 296).

Finally, the alignment of conservation ethics to the new practices is a shift that seems to be in progress in the conservation field. It was only at the beginning of the 1960s that the ethics of conservation practice started being concretised, through detailed theories and official guidelines:¹⁵⁰ the relevant literature continued to evolve,¹⁵¹ but still there have been no official guidelines in relation to the contemporary art paradigm. Broaching the issue, conservator Debra Hess Norris stated in 1999 that conservation ethics “are not culturally or historically based—

¹⁵⁰ The book *Teoria del Restauro* by Cesare Brandi was published in 1963; the Murray Pease Report was in development from 1961 to 1963; and the Venice Charter appeared in 1964.

¹⁵¹ E.g., Clavir 1998, 2002 and 2009; Villers 2004; Viñas 2005 and 2009. And, The Nara Document on Authenticity (World Heritage Committee 1994); Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013a; the Yamato Declaration (UNESCO 2004).

they are universal; therefore, ethics developed for the care and preservation of the traditional arts should and must apply to modern and contemporary art as well” (Hess Norris 1999, 131). However, the applicability of traditional conservation ethics to contemporary art has now been contested widely¹⁵² and new theoretical frameworks are being explored.¹⁵³

It becomes rather clear that, in the case of contemporary art, the practice of conservation has become rather complex: there are diverse focusing points and diverse ethical principles; and there are requirements for new attitudes, new practices and new collaborations. The crucial question then is: have conservators really been trained to respond to those challenges? Does academic training equip conservators with the set of skills required to respond adequately and responsibly to such diverse and complex roles? In the concluding section we need to address this important issue.

V. Conservation training and the contemporary art paradigm

Conservator Christian Scheidemann has described a certain incident that raises the issue of appropriate training:

At one point we had a Douglas Huebler from 1969, which was a collage with some photographs stuck to an acidic backboard with a non-archival adhesive. We asked a paper conservator to replace the acidic cardboard. The work was carried out to the appropriate standard but it looked wrong. It was too neat and tidy and was a departure from the original intention of the artist. It looked completely different, like a page from the bible. (Brown and Learner 2010, 7)

The relevant incident was shared in a panel discussion, as a “way to identify the salient needs of the field for the conservation of modern and contemporary art” (ibid., 6). The panel discussion was part of the two-day meeting *Training needs for the conservation of modern and contemporary art*, which took place in June 2010, organised by the Education and Training (E&T) and Modern Materials and Contemporary Art (MMCA) working groups of ICOM-

¹⁵² See, for instance: Buskirk 2003; Wharton 2005; Laurensen 2006; Macedo 2006; Van Saaze 2013; Van de Vall 2015a.

¹⁵³ For instance, Renée Van de Vall, in her essay *Documenting Dilemmas*, proclaims that in the last two decades, alongside the establishment of “scientific conservation”, there is a gradual development of two new ethical paradigms for conservation — the “performance paradigm” and the “processual paradigm” (Van de Vall 2015a).

CC.¹⁵⁴ The meeting opened with the bold statement that “[m]odern and contemporary art presents enormous challenges to the conservation profession”; the relevant challenges were described as pertaining mainly to new materials, new technologies and new ethical dilemmas (ibid., 1). The meeting aimed to map the ways in which *conservation training would need to change*, in order to support more efficiently the care of contemporary artworks. As in the case of Scheidemann’s description, discussions mostly revolved around competencies that lie beyond material and technological expertise. Participants, for instance, highlighted the skills needed for effective collaboration and negotiation, understanding of artist’s intent, documentation, knowledge brokering, and problem solving. Further, the need for the conservator’s acute awareness of their own influence to the work and the need for transparency were said to require training in subjects of social sciences. It is useful to consider some representative contributions, in order to gain an insight on these directions of thought.

When asked what she feels is missing from the training that fellows had before working at SFMOMA, Jill Sterrett commented on a lack of accord between the university and the museum and a disagreement on what a specialisation in contemporary art should entail: “they are getting materials training but are not getting rigorous training on problem-solving [...] I often hear that the training programs think that they are covering contemporary art, but I don’t think we are speaking the same language” (ibid., 10). Sterrett also referred to interpersonal skills: “This idea of collaborating is not fundamental to the programs at all. To work in contemporary museums, one needs to collaborate more than is necessary with traditional conservation disciplines. This needs to be modelled more in programs” (ibid., 11).

Glenn Wharton was one of the participants to refer to the relevance of the social sciences and wondered whether universities should actually drop parts of their curriculum, in order to be able to add new subjects:

It seems to me that there are a range of skills and knowledge that we need to address, related to the art that is produced today, such as: social science understanding and the approach towards the artists. In order to add these skills to training programs, do we drop some of the traditional subjects we’ve been teaching, or do you learn this after you graduate? For example, do we still teach how to cast bronze, and to treat wood, or do we just drop them? (ibid., 11)

¹⁵⁴ The meeting took place at the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, immediately after the *Contemporary Art: Who Cares?* conference.

Christian Scheidemann, on the other hand, attempted to highlight a knowledge gap in the museum stewardship practice and to map an area of research that fails to be addressed by either art history or conservation:

What I'm focusing on falls in the gap between art history and conservation. Art history deals with history and theory, conservation deals with treatment; we need to focus on what artists were trying to express not just in the material, but also in their attitude. Here I'm thinking of the history of concepts in art, not the history of art. (ibid., 11)

Reflecting on the documented discussions of the meeting —the incidents shared and the many suggestions and opinions voiced over the two-days,— a particular shared concern seems to prevail: that traditional conservation training is not appropriate to the perpetuation of contemporary artworks and leaves conservators mostly unprepared for many of the challenges raised by contemporary art. The confirmed gap between education and industry was, in other words, the shared concern and the shared target of the meeting's discussions.

Reflection on how conservation training should be adjusted to correspond to the demands of contemporary art perpetuation is not new to the field: it has been undergoing at least since 1997. For instance, during the *MAWC* conference (1997), in a seminar dedicated to the subject of training, such reflections were expressed by the representatives of two educational establishments (Anne van Grevenstein from the Limburg Conservation Institute (SRAL) and Mikkel Scharff from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation (KADK)):

The concept of modern art¹⁵⁵ might also change the conservator's traditional focus from material aspects to more abstract ones — that is, towards conservation of ideas and experiences [...] Starting from the existing programmes for the education of conservators of traditional art, we are comforted with the awkward task of selecting relevant components and discarding others [...] The basic point is to teach people how to analyse and solve conservation problems of modern works of art

¹⁵⁵ Looking on the particular artworks researched as part of *MAWC*, it is clear that the term “modern art” was used in the *MAWC* conference to refer to what the discourse today terms as “contemporary art”.

while paying due attention to the meaning of these works. Because teaching materials and techniques will perforce be limited to general knowledge, in this case the emphasis should be on knowing where to find expertise [...] The aim is an education that balances basic conservation skills against context-oriented conservation and includes knowledge of art, approaches to composite materials, multidisciplinary communication, decision-making, and ‘functional ethics’.

(Grevenstein and Scharff 2005 [1999], 296–7)

There are indications that this proposal was not widely embraced by educational institutions.¹⁵⁶ In the *Conservation Issues of Modern and Contemporary Art* (CIMCA) meeting,¹⁵⁷ which GCI organised in June 2008, participants reported “a significant amount of disagreement on how best to achieve the most appropriate training for [modern and contemporary art] conservators, and on how to get around the limitations of existing educational models” (GCI 2008, 4). Participants also reflected on desirable qualities for “the new breed” of modern and contemporary art conservator, such as: “problem solving skills, ability to evaluate complex and abstract data, ability to make collaborative decisions, ability to arrive at negotiated outcomes, skills in engineering or structural issues, and experience with all aspects of digital imaging and processing” (ibid., 9).

What is currently (i.e., in 2020) the official conservation training regarding contemporary artworks? In Appendix V¹⁵⁸, I explore the training provided by four academic institutions: University of Amsterdam (UVA), Netherlands;¹⁵⁹ Universidade Nova de Lisboa

¹⁵⁶ Even in the case of the two institutions whose representatives jointly developed the proposal, only one of them materialised their plan of addressing contemporary art in their curricula. In 1998 SRAL established the first training programme fully devoted to modern and contemporary art in the world (ICOM-CC 2010, 3). The programme claims that it offers great expertise in the field of restoration; at the same time, it provides training on artist’s interviews and puts emphasis on interpersonal skills (see: www.sral.nl/en/wat/moderne-en-hedendaagse-kunst/ [accessed 1 May 2019]). However, in the case of KADK, while in 2019 (when I researched the School) Mikkel Scharff was still the Head of the Conservation Department, a specialisation in contemporary art is not on offer (see: <https://kadm.dk/program/kunstlinjen/om-programmet> [accessed 1 May 2019]).

¹⁵⁷ As participants were listed: “conservators from a number of key institutions and in private practice, as well as scientists, collection managers, and those involved in conservation training programs and professional networks for contemporary art” (GCI 2008, 1).

¹⁵⁸ Page 191.

¹⁵⁹ As a reminder: the *Inside Installations* project as well as the MAWC conference and publication were initiatives of SBMK and ICN. While in UVA, Program Leader in Contemporary Art Conservation is Sanneke Stigter, a leading scholar in the field.

(UNL), Portugal;¹⁶⁰ Bern University of the Arts (BUA), Switzerland;¹⁶¹ and finally, the Institute of Fine Arts (IFA), in New York University¹⁶². On the basis of the different curricula discussed in Appendix V, one can observe that training institutions approach the conservation of contemporary art as requiring standard conservation training, with an added expertise on a range of different materials and technologies, as well as an added training on artist's interviews. This is certainly progress. But —at least from the standpoint of the participants of the 2010 ICOM-CC meeting,— it may not be progress enough.

As will be discussed in the following Chapter, it is arguable whether curators are in a more privileged position to care properly for contemporary artworks: in this case, there may even be further reasons for concern.

¹⁶⁰ The University was represented in the 2008 CIMCA meeting, with conservator Stephan Schaefer (at the time Professor for Painting and Contemporary Art Conservation at the University) being one of the 26 invited experts. At the same time, Rita Macedo (Professor of Contemporary Art History and Documentation for the Preservation of Contemporary Art and Coordinator of the Art History area at the Department of Conservation and Restoration) has been actively participating in leading international initiatives, while her doctorate of 2008 addressed conservation and documentation challenges of Portuguese Art from the 60's and 70's.

¹⁶¹ BUA has been a pioneer in the field, offering specialisation in modern materials and media conservation since 1999.

¹⁶² The time-based media specialisation in IFA is the most recent entry in contemporary art conservation training (established in 2018) and it was chosen for this research with the understanding that it would possibly address the most recent developments in the discourse.

Chapter III.

Perpetuation concerns and curatorial practice: a fragile dynamic

As presented in the previous Chapter, the art conservation profession has been largely evolving collectively and through an engaged discourse: one in which challenges are shared and debated, with the ultimate aim of an ideally unified practice. The discipline of museum curating, in contrast, is quite individualistic: it is rather more prone to unique ideas, innovative approaches and personal style and has evolved mainly through the distinctive practice of individual practitioners. Further, and as it will be discussed in detail in this Chapter, the challenges that artworks present are not addressed as such in the curatorial discourse and the direction of a curator's approach is not collectively contemplated.

The aim of this Chapter is to explore the role of the curator with regard to the challenge of perpetuation of contemporary artworks. As it will be discussed further on in this Chapter, heritage literature lacks detailed accounts on the actual involvement of curators in processes of perpetuation. In an attempt to help fill that gap in the literature, a large part of the material used in this Chapter comes from interviews I conducted with practitioners during my research for this thesis. My analysis will depart, in §I, from a brief historical overview of the curator's profession, as this has been drawn by some of the key scholars in the curatorial discourse. In §II, I will consider the curator's role in a contemporary art museum: the range of activities curators are involved with and the status they have within the museum structure, acknowledging that both of these impinge on their overall stance towards contemporary artworks. In §III, I will consider specifically the curators' stance on the task of contemporary art perpetuation: in particular, I will examine how they conceive of this task and how they tend to confront it. In §IV, I will explore conservators' interaction with the museum professionals that are also involved in the task of perpetuation, i.e., conservators: in particular, I will explore how curators and conservators collaborate, as well as the ways in which curators conceive of their own role and that of conservators. Further, I will trace the processes of decision-making with regard to the aim of perpetuating contemporary artworks, highlighting the role of hierarchies within such processes. As it is important for our purposes to also understand the mindset with which museum curators enter the profession, in §V I will explore the direction of currently available curatorial training.

I. The development of the role; from keeper to the contemporary art curator

Early formations

In 2009, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist published the book “A Brief History of Curating” in which the practice and ideas of 11 of the most important curators of the second half of the last century (Anne d’Harnoncourt (1943–2008), Werner Hofmann (1928–2013), Jean Leering (1934–2005), Franz Meyer (1919–2007), Seth Siegelaub (1941–2013), Walter Zanini (1925–2013), Johannes Cladders (1924–2009), Lucy Lippard (b. 1937), Walter Hopps (1932–2005), Pontus Hultén (1924–2006), and Harald Szeemann (1933–2005)) are presented through the 11 interviews Obrist conducted with them in the period between 1996 to 2007. As hinted by Obrist’s approach on his undertaking, the history of curating is a history mainly told through distinct eponymous accomplishments.

Although the museum curator¹⁶³ started as a largely behind-the-scene administrative role of looking after, organising and presenting a museum’s collection to the public, this straightforward and unsophisticated function of the role was soon to be overturned. One of the early practitioners discussed as being instrumental in moving the role forward, from that of an administrator/facilitator/caretaker to that of a connoisseur, is Alfred Barr (1902–1981). Back in 1929, the very first director of MoMA, New York, was a knowledgeable, brave and studious art historian; he introduced, mediated and defended modern art to the public; and became one of the first well-known curators. Barr was an instrumental figure in paving the way for the powerful position that curators were meant to have within the museum structure, and within culture more widely.

Diverging from the model of the connoisseur—represented by curators such as Barr, whose practice reflected on their academic knowledge—in her essay “What is a Curator?” curator Jessica Morgan points to colleagues such as Alexander Dorner (1893–1957), Pontus Hultén (1924–2006), Marcia Tucker (1940–2006), Walter Hopps (1932–2005), Henry Geldzahler (1935–1994) and Kynaston McShine (1935–2018), whose practice was instead fuelled by a desire to radically rethink the institution and to establish new publics (Morgan 2013, 23–4). Apart from Alexander Dorner, whose museum career dates back to the 1920’s,

¹⁶³ The role can also be signified by different terms, such as “keeper” (still in use in some cases in UK) and “conservateur” (still in use in some cases in France).

all other curators in Morgan's list began their museum careers in the 1960's – i.e., when the curator's approach to exhibitions began to shift with no return.

Curator as creator

Already from the early and mid-20th century, the exhibition space and event came to be approached as a material for creative experimentation: El Lissitzky's *The Abstract Cabinet* (1927) and Marcel Duchamp's *Mile of String* (1942) are two famous examples of this development. At the beginning, this new type of activation of the exhibition space and event —although endorsed in most cases by curators,— was an artist's act: more specifically, an act by Dada artists. In the following years, as the role of the curator continued to evolve from individual to individual, curators started to explore *themselves* the creative potential of the exhibition as a medium, thus bringing the gradual transformation of exhibitions to almost autonomous entities and a major evolution in the discipline of curating. The 1960's are registered as the period when curators began to initiate their own, individual experimentations with the exhibition, claiming the right to invent and propose new narratives, thus outgrowing their role of merely managing and mediating those of the artists and of artworks.

This new situation gave rise to an important and lasting debate in the curatorial discourse, which pertains to the nature of curator's authorship: whether it is a primary authorship or a meta-authorship and, subsequently, whether it contests the authorship of the artist.¹⁶⁴ In their analysis of the curator's role as an exhibition auteur, sociologists Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak point to the transition of the exhibition from a transparent medium to an authored work and comment that critics “no longer content with discussing the exhibition's subject, they tend to stress the exhibition as an object in and of itself, more frequently citing the ‘author’” (Heinich and Pollak 1996, 237). Similarly, curator Paul O' Neill has noted that “the critique of the institution of art began to call into question the curatorial act and the ways in which it was affecting the boundaries of art's production, responsibility for its authorship and its mediation” (O'Neill 2012, 14).

As noted by museums' scholar Bruce Altshuler, in the 1960s we entered the “world of advanced exhibitions”, which brought “the rise of the curator as creator” (Altshuler 1994, 236). It is in that same period that the possibility of an independent curator¹⁶⁵ came to be actualised

¹⁶⁴ See, for instance: Altshuler 1994; Heinich and Pollak 1996; Groys 2006; Bishop 2007; Hoffmann 2007; Buden 2012; O'Neill 2012; Ventzislavov 2014.

¹⁶⁵ See: Fowle 2007, 13.

— for instance, in the rather distinctive case of Harald Szeemann, regarded as the curator who proved that the “curatorial practice is a form of art in itself” (Derieux 2007, 10). In 1969, Szeemann decided to continue his work outside a fixed institutional position, after eight very productive years as a director in Kunsthalle Bern¹⁶⁶ and having being forced to resign from the institution, due to the wide spread controversy raised by his ground-breaking exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Live in Your Head* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969). Szeemann, who chose for himself the term “Ausstellungsmacher” (a maker of exhibitions), described his role as that of “an administrator, amateur, author of introductions, librarian, manager and accountant, animator, conservator, financier, and diplomat” (Fowle 2007, 16). In an interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in 1995, Szeemann declared that “the curator has to be flexible. Sometimes he is the servant, sometimes the assistant, sometimes he gives artists ideas of how to present their work; in group shows he’s the coordinator, in thematic shows, the inventor” (Obrist 2011 [2009], 127). Szeemann also referred to a slogan he was using for himself: “From Vision to Nail”, which meant that in an exhibition he did “everything from conceptualizing the project to hanging the works” (ibid., 111–2).

The role of the independent curator diverged in multiple ways from that of a curator in an institution. In an independent role, curators enjoyed a greater creative freedom with regard to the content and outlook of the exhibitions they staged; however, at the same time, they were faced with many more responsibilities. Additionally, curators who worked outside the multi-layered structure of the institution were brought closer to artists in a much more direct type of collaboration. At the same time, not having to care for a collection, their focus could turn entirely towards facilitating the artwork in the temporal present of its instantiation. As will be evidenced further on in this Chapter, many aspects of the independent curator’s role have gradually infiltrated the role of the museum curator.¹⁶⁷

The fact that curators found successful ways to stage their work outside the frame of the institution allowed them to claim an influential role in culture and society.¹⁶⁸ Beyond functioning as facilitators of institutional purposes, curators declared that they had something to say *themselves* and their leap to independence reflected exactly this: their capability and

¹⁶⁶ A period where Szeemann, legendarily, curated one show every month (see: Birnbaum 2005, 55).

¹⁶⁷ This is due to the fact that many curators actually move between independent and museum positions throughout their career —carrying with them their already formed approaches and practices— while, at the same time, there are independent curators that curate exhibitions in museums as invited practitioners, in this way influencing museum practice. For a reflection on the effects of the interaction between independent curators and institutions, see: Hoffmann 2007, 139–42.

¹⁶⁸ Further facts promoted this claim: i.e., the fact that the exhibition started to acquire the status of art in its own right, and the fact that art installations, as well as process and performance-based works, made the curator more involved in the artist’s process.

desire to address the public as individual creators. Paul O'Neil has actually commented that the introduction of the independent curator activated a gradual change in the perception of the role towards a "centralised position on a much broader stage, with a creative, political and active part to play in the production, mediation and dissemination of art itself" (O'Neil 2007, 12).

Contemporary art curator

All these developments brought in the 1990s the emergence of what various scholars discuss as the "contemporary art curator".¹⁶⁹ This new type of curator, who bears specific characteristics due to working with contemporary art, monopolised the curatorial discourse, while the wide-spread influence of its role brought discussions about what art critic and curator Michael Brenson called in 1998 "the curator's moment". In August 1997, Brenson was invited to attend and report on a conference organised and financed by the Rockefeller Foundation, where 15 curators from all continents —working with contemporary art and, most of them, having museum positions— gathered to reflect on the challenges of international contemporary art exhibitions. It is important to clarify here that the challenges shared between the conference participants didn't relate to the challenges of perpetuating contemporary art, on which this dissertation focuses. As reported by Brenson, the discussed challenges concerned the exhibitions' subject matter and the task of engaging new audiences. In particular, the participants addressed the challenge of presenting cross-cultural exhibitions and the associated need to provide contextualisation for unfamiliar audiences, as well as the challenge of addressing memory, history and responsibility in exhibitions that touch upon urgent social and political issues. Brenson's report is essentially a very important treatise on the authority and influence curators have on culture and society at large. Brenson writes that after the three days of the conference it became clear to him that "the era of the curator has began [*sic*]". Commenting on his impression of the participants in the conference, their contributions and the mindset that those revealed, he notes:

Curators must be at once aestheticians, diplomats, economists, critics, historians, politicians, audience developers, and promoters. They must be able to communicate not only with artists but also with community leaders, business

¹⁶⁹ See, for instance: Ramirez 1994; Hoffmann 2007; Hernández Chong Cuy 2013; Žerovc 2015.

executives, and heads of state [...] The new curator understands, and is able to articulate, the ability of art to touch and mobilize people and encourage debates about spirituality, creativity, identity, and the nation. (Brenson 1998, 16)

Brenson ascribes to the curator a powerful position and underlines the individualistic character of the role: the curator is presented as a highly self-driven, ambitious and convincing individual, who—even if part of a team—works in solitude with an “inexhaustible supply of belief, focus, resilience [*sic*], and nerve” (ibid., 18). Various curators have been discussed as representative figures of the contemporary art curator. For instance, writer and curator Jens Hoffmann points in particular to Hans Ulrich Obrist (b. 1968), Maria Lind (b. 1966), Eric Troncy (b. 1965), Sabine Breitwieser (b. 1962), Ute Meta Bauer (b. 1958), Thelma Golden (b. 1965) and Hou Hanru (b. 1963). Hoffmann clarifies that, although these individuals have initiated “a clear paradigmatic shift in curating” and some affinities can be observed between them, there are also substantial disparities (Hoffmann 2007, 138–40).

At the time that the role of the contemporary art curator took shape and visibility, a development in the system of curator’s education signalled the separation of the curator’s role from that of the art historian. Although prior to 1990 the most appropriate and expected educational background for a curator was considered that of Art History, this was to be challenged by the institutional establishment of curatorial studies. In 1990, the Bard College’s Center for Curatorial Studies (CCS Bard) was founded in New York, launching a master’s degree in curating in 1994; while, in 1992 the Royal College of Art and in 1994 the De Appel in Amsterdam established their own curatorial programmes.¹⁷⁰ As specified by curator and CCS Bard graduate Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, all three programmes “started with and continued to maintain a focus on curating contemporary art” (Hernández Chong Cuy 2013, 61). With the establishment of these programmes, it became institutionally verified that curators, and in particular curators of contemporary art, required different skills and expertise than those required by art historians. The full professionalisation of the curator’s role had begun and contemporary art curators were on the forefront of the role’s evolution.

¹⁷⁰ The programmes of study of these institutions will be discussed in detail in the training section of this Chapter, as well as in Appendix VI (page 194).

II. Curators in a contemporary art museum: responsibilities and status

Many tasks

As discussed in the previous section, the curator's role has changed dramatically from the mainly administrative role of the early 1900s. Today, curators are positioned at the intersection of different concerns: the collective expectation of contributing their individual narratives; the artwork's past, present and future; the artist; art history; the institution; the collection; the exhibition event; the public. This complex position translates to a great number of responsibilities, which, moreover, different practitioners prioritise in different ways, thus making the role rather varied. Curator Jessica Morgan noted this variability, when asked about the curator's daily activities:

[T]he answer is dependent entirely on the curator: an academically capable researcher who spends the majority of their time in libraries versus a transient, independent curator visiting the studios of a global array of artists? Or an institutionally based, bureaucratically driven curator fulfilling the demands of trustees versus the director of a small nonprofit scrambling for financial support but relatively free to experiment? The possibilities are endless, although, hopefully, especially if you are talking about contemporary curators, the majority of one's time is spent thinking about art and working with artists. (Morgan 2013, 29)

Cultural critic Boris Buden notes, in a similar vein, that "the curator has always had to care for more than art itself" (Buden 2012, 23). Guggenheim curator Nat Trotman confirmed this insight, when the issue of time devoted to research was raised in his interview:

Obviously, research is a big part, but it's the pale stepchild to all of the other things that we [curators] have to do and then there is just like administrative duties throughout the museum that anyone who has been here for a long time has to do deal with. So, trying to help with the social media agenda for the museum, or like the strategy for publications, or various things like that. (Theodoraki and Trotman 2018)

It is a well-known fact that, beyond working with art, curators often have an expanded role in the museum, contributing actively in its management and administration, its finance, its social and political agenda and its relationship with the art market. The fact that, for most museums, art is no longer their foremost priority, can be seen as a further reason for the dispersal of the curator's role across multiple activities within the museum. In 1998, Michael Brenson remarked:

In New York, hardly anyone informed about art institutions is under the illusion that any of the city's big museums cares first and foremost for art, no matter how brilliant and sustaining their exhibitions may be or how exemplary they may be in caring for the art entrusted to them. Curatorial programs serve institutional and board interests and agendas that are economic, social, and political as much as they are aesthetic. These interests, more than the needs of artists, or of contemporary art, are at the forefront of exhibition programming in powerhouse museums in the United States. (Brenson 1998, 23)

In an environment with such interests, curators cannot but expand the focus of their practice. So, there is no doubt that curating is a varied practice. But, as will be explained in what follows, by the same token curators have acquired a very powerful position within the structure of the museum and within the artworld as a whole.¹⁷¹

Position of power

Curators have a powerful position within institutions and this is reflected by the fact that the natural progression for many curators is to become museum or institutional directors (Morgan 2013, 28). Curators' powerful status is the result of multiple factors; in order to better understand the underlying dynamics that are at play with regard to processes of perpetuation, it is important to explore these factors in some detail.

The status of the curator cannot but relate directly to the main function of the role: by deciding what is to be exhibited and what is to be collected, curators establish what art is relevant and valuable; therefore, they have the power of influencing the distribution of

¹⁷¹ Although different curators can exert the power that they have in their disposal differently, still (and regardless of the personal attitude of an individual curator) the general status that curators have influences the way they are perceived and approached by others.

resources and of determining the future of art. In the case of working with living artists, in particular —beyond studying, reflecting on and interpreting art history, beyond even determining what becomes art history,— curators support the viability of the practice of their selected artists through the very endorsement of their work, and thus they determine, in a sense, what art can or cannot be produced. Reflecting on the influence of curators, Maria Lind refers to cultural heritage as “curated cultural past” (Lind 2012, 12). Whereas Boris Buden proposes to imagine the curator’s role as that of a “(cultural) customs officer” and a “gatekeeper”, having the power of “silencing”, “trashing”, “veiling” and “rendering powerless” a part of artistic and cultural production:

[T]he curator allows some objects to enter, while blocking others and thereby devaluating them, leaving them to oblivion, or otherwise annihilating them. [...] Mediating, thus, draws borderlines and establishes demarcations. Concretely, not only does it determine the internal content of a cultural heritage but also its outside, its external “leftovers,” the space of “cultural trash,” which is not worth inheriting. [...] This explains one very important duty the curator assumes in the field of contemporary art. Precisely in accomplishing a selection, she establishes the demarcation that define the so-called art system. Curators draw the boundary between the inside of today’s art system and its outside, operating at this boundary as gatekeepers. This too, is what they take care of and look after — the boundaries that distinguish the space of contemporary art. They introduce a threshold into this space, and control traffic of artistic goods and values in accordance with that threshold. (Buden 2012, 30–1)

Buden describes here a professional with the absolute power of determining an artist’s career. And, in relation to our purposes, it is useful to consider the effect that this can have on the negotiations between an artist and a museum curator regarding the specifics of an artwork’s instantiation.

In fact, curators’ status is further strengthened through the close relationship they are in a position to form with the creators of the works. Museums have an interest in maintaining an active connection with artists, since this can support them in having greater control on their

programming and their collections.¹⁷² This active connection between the museum and the artist is formed and maintained by the curator. Curators would be the ones considering an artist's practice and inviting them to exhibit in the museum. Curators are the ones who would need to discuss with the artist in order to collect information for the production of texts that accompany the exhibitions. In cases where the artist is involved in configuring their work within the exhibition space during the set-up of an exhibition, it is curators that will collaborate with them in this process. There are also the complex processes that this thesis addresses — documenting the artwork's defining properties, instantiating variable artworks, and making decisions pertaining to format migration, framing devices and display equipment,— as will be discussed further on in this Chapter, even when conservators of contemporary art are involved, curators maintain a close dialogue with the artist during such processes.

Curators have also been gaining power through their bonds with the wider artworld and, particularly, by being in close dialogue and collaboration with powerful private collectors. The relationship between curators and private collectors is, in fact, endorsed by museums: as noted by curator Peter Eleey, major collecting museums provide their curators as consultants to the private sector (Eleey 2013, 119). The reasons for which museums endorse this close relationship between curators and collectors are financial: using the words of Jessica Morgan, “[v]ery few, if any, museums are able to collect without private support” (Morgan 2013, 26). When this type of private support is pursued, it is indeed curators who have the role of motivating private collectors to acquire and donate particular artworks to the museum's collection. Nonetheless, the relationship between curators and private collectors is strong *by default*, due to the co-dependency that characterises it. While collectors have the resources to support the enrichment of a museum's collection, curators have the power to determine the value of a private collection, by promoting (through exhibitions) the artists represented in it.

A further factor which has been strengthening the curator's status is what scholars report as the *gradual waning* of the separate role of the art critic.¹⁷³ Jessica Morgan has commented that, “in part a result of curatorial involvement in the critical and theoretical discourse of the 1980”, the curatorial voice has merged with the critical one, forming “one double-headed beast”, thus destroying any possibility for publicly voiced dissent (ibid.). As curators often take the role of critics, it is similarly not uncommon to find art critics turning into curators, either permanently or periodically. An early example of this trend is the

¹⁷² A close connection with particular curators and the museums they work in, could influence artists to favour them when planning a show in the pick of their career as well as when a key work of theirs is on sale.

¹⁷³ See, for instance: O'Neill 2007, 14 and Morgan 2013.

exhibitions that Rosalind E. Krauss curated at the Guggenheim in the 70's.¹⁷⁴ Of course, there are still art critics that are not involved in curating and their writings have a constant presence in media.¹⁷⁵ But still, today's art critic does not seem to have the authority and influence that, for instance, art critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1994) had on American Abstract Expressionism. Nowadays, this type of authority and influence seems to be solely a curators' privilege.

The prestige of the museum curator was also supported by the curators' leap to independent work: curators proved that they can be very influential outside of an institutional position and very successful in drawing the attention of audiences. At the same time, those museum curators who enter the museum with the experience of working independently, have the benefit of the extended networks that they have built through their independent collaborations — networks that can variously support their museum career.

Lastly, the curators' power is enhanced by their visibility as the authors of exhibitions: as Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak (1989) note: "the exhibition curator's function authorizes a measure of fame which eludes other colleagues" (Heinich and Pollak 1996, 237). As curators are visible, eponymous and, often, the public face of institutions, they are able to possess symbolic capital — a capital that pertains to prestige, celebrity and honour. It is important now to consider how museum curators stand in relation to the challenge of perpetuation of contemporary artworks, given the variability of their role but also their position of power within the museum and beyond.

III. Curators and contemporary artwork's perpetuation

In the literature about museum roles and their responsibilities, the curator's involvement in decision-making with regard to the perpetuation of artworks is far from being described in detail. In "The Handbook for Museums" (1994), there is a reference to the curator as someone who "does research and oversees the maintenance, use and enhancement of collections" (Edson and Dean 1994, 290). In "Museums – A Place to Work. Planning Museum Careers" (1996), there is a mention to responsibilities in relation to processes of authentication and "arranging and monitoring the care and security of the collections" (Glaser and Zenetou 1996, 80–1). In the document "Professional Practices for Art Museum Curators" (2007) by the Association of

¹⁷⁴ See: Krauss and Rowell 1972.

¹⁷⁵ See, for instance, the cases of Louisa Elderton writing for *Flash Art*, *Frieze* and *Artforum*; Martha Schwendener writing for the *New York Times*; Adrian Searle in the *Guardian*; and Peter Schjeldahl writing for *The New Yorker*.

Art Museum Curators, it is stated that: “[t]he curator has a fundamental role in ensuring that works of art are properly conserved, stored, and exhibited. This includes working with relevant museum staff to prepare detailed notes about the appropriate presentation of all works of art, especially installation art and work in new media” (AAMC 2007, 12). All these references position the curator in a supervisory role regarding the documentation and care of artworks, but they do not go into detail about specific processes and the professionals involved in those processes.

With regard to contemporary art, contemporary art dealer Karsten Schubert remarks in *Curator’s Egg* that the abandonment of the frame and the plinth¹⁷⁶ “changed forever the role of the curator”. Schubert explains that the curator of contemporary art “is often engaged in developing solutions to specific installations and space problems in close dialogue with the artist, more like a collaborator than a curator” and that he has to act either as a negotiator between artists’ demands and institutional requirements, or as an interpreter and executor of the artist’s intentions (in the case where the artist is not alive) (Schubert 2009, 85). In what follows I will explore curators’ stance towards contemporary art: as will be seen, this tends to manifest openness to improvisation and, in cases, even a lax attitude towards documentation.

Openness to improvisation and sense of autonomy

In the conservation discipline, the challenges that concern the perpetuation of contemporary artworks are collectively contemplated and a shared approach is sought after: as already noted, however, this attitude is not shared by curators, who often demonstrate an openness to improvisation.

Of course, there are exceptions: there are indeed curators who contribute actively in conferences and publications initiated and organised by the community of conservators.¹⁷⁷ Further, there are curators who have actively initiated themselves cross-disciplinary discussions as well as collaborative research on the subject. One such case is the immensely important SBMK, whose establishment in 1995 is owed to a committee of curators and conservators from six museums of modern and contemporary art in the Netherlands (formed impromptu in 1993, as noted in the introduction of this thesis). Another important case is that

¹⁷⁶ Nathalie Heinich has identified this abandonment as the turning point for the birth of the contemporary art paradigm. See: Heinich 2015 and in particular page 308.

¹⁷⁷ See, for instance, the contribution by curator Ann Temkin to the *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art* conference and publication that were organised by the GCI (Temkin 1999).

of artist, writer and curator Jon Ippolito: while an Associate Curator of Media Arts at the Guggenheim,¹⁷⁸ Ippolito conceived, designed and developed the Variable Media Initiative¹⁷⁹ in 1998, which proposed a unique preservation strategy for TBM, digital, performance, and installation works.¹⁸⁰ Ippolito is a very important example of a curator deeply invested in creating and spreading knowledge that can support the preservation of variable contemporary artworks: he organised research workshops, conferences, publications and exhibitions on the subject; he brought an interdisciplinary network of people working together; he designed a new documentation system/platform for artists and stewards to use; and he created a clear philosophical framework for the care of such works.¹⁸¹

However, beyond selected cases, the challenge of perpetuating contemporary artworks does not seem to be a subject of concern for curators. For instance, in recent (yet already canonical) publications, where curators discuss in detail their practice and the preoccupations of their role,¹⁸² there is no mention of the curator's role in processes of perpetuation. In an interview with curator Elena Crippa —while in the position of Curator, Modern and Contemporary British Art in Tate Britain,— I asked for her opinion as to why the challenge of perpetuating contemporary artworks is not publicly discussed and debated by curators, as it is debated by conservators. Crippa responded as follows:

Nothing for a curator is a challenge to a certain degree, because it is just what it is. And, what for a conservator *is* a challenge or a potential risk, or a problem, for us is just part of the nature (the specificity) of the work. So, I think, we just look at it in a slightly different way, we are also very attuned to the fact that artists, so many

¹⁷⁸ A position he had from 1991 to 2006.

¹⁷⁹ The project was supported by the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology.

¹⁸⁰ For a reference to Ippolito's involvement in the Initiative, see:

www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pre_session_one.html [accessed 15 August 2019].

¹⁸¹ For the conference *Preserving the Immaterial: A Conference on Variable Media* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2001), one of the conferences that Ippolito organised together with curator John G. Hanhardt, visit: www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pre_index.html [accessed 12 August 2019].

For the Variable Media Questionnaire, a database which offers a different way to describe and document an artwork (one that avoids reference to the media involved in the artwork's production or to the work's physical components, focussing instead on an artwork's intrinsic behaviours, characteristics and effects) visit:

<http://variablemediaquestionnaire.net/> [accessed 12 August 2019].

For the publication *Permanence Through Change: The Variable media Approach*, visit:

www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pub_index.html [accessed 12 August 2019].

For the exhibition *Seeing Double: Emulation in Theory and Practice*, visit:

www.variablemedia.net/e/seeingdouble/index.html [accessed 12 August 2019].

For Ippolito's essay *Accommodating the Unpredictable*, which presents the philosophy behind the VMI approach visit: <http://thoughtmesh.net/publish/301.php> [accessed 12 August 2019].

¹⁸² See, for instance: O'Neill 2007 and 2012; O'Neill and Wilson 2010 and 2013; Smith 2012; Paul Martinon 2013; and, Žerovc 2015.

artists (from painters in the 60s, to very young artists working with organic material nowadays), really believe in the ephemerality of the work. And the destiny of the work is to change over time and this is absolutely acceptable and it's not an issue and we do not see it as much as an issue. [...] It is very difficult, because while I was answering, I was thinking "oh, it is actually very different for different works". For certain works, where I know that the artist would have wanted a very particular type of finish or polish, of course, it is very important to me that it retains that, but then we just find a way of doing it. We record that (we have conversations with the artist, so we find out) and, if it needs to be re-spray-painted every time, we do that. Or, if that element needs to be changed every time, we do that. It's not a problem, it's just part of what you do. For me, there are no problems, the only problems (which are not problems, are interesting questions) is where there is no documentation, and as a curator you need to make a call. And this, for me, is when it's both quite daunting and very exciting, about having to make that call. (Theodoraki and Crippa 2018)

Crippa's response indicates that she considers the relevant issues as part of a curator's regular task of mediating artworks. She discusses them as issues that can be dealt with by the curator on a case-by-case basis, through discussions with the artist and with the support of relevant documentation — therefore, not necessitating public debates, wide consensus, and collective actions. For cases where there is no documentation, Crippa points directly, and with absolute certainty, to the curator as the person in charge of making the required decisions. Crippa's response thus reflects confidence, determination, and a clear belief that curators are to take full responsibility of the artworks they work with.

In the previous Chapter, I referred to the SFMOMA Team Media meetings that Jill Sterrett initiated at the Museum in 1995, in order to cross-departmentally discuss challenges regarding the presentation and long-term care of media artworks. In an interview with Sterrett, she noted that curator Bob Riley —the SFMOMA Media Curator at the time— was not taking part in those meetings:¹⁸³ "he was a really wonderful dynamic guy and I think he sort of thought 'all of these is my job' like: 'you guys can worry, I don't need to come to your meeting, I am taking care of everything'" (Theodoraki and Sterrett 2018). This note on Bob Riley, along with

¹⁸³ As Sterrett described, the situation changed with the new curators who undertook the post; first Benjamin Weil and afterwards Rudolf Frieling were both supporters of approaching the relevant issues collaboratively.

Crippa's response, suggest a particular, individualistic attitude: even when working in a museum (therefore working as part of a team), curators seem to be comfortable and confident to assume personal responsibility, to take the lead in decision-making and to act independently. This stance is reflected in their attitudes and approaches towards the contemporary art perpetuation challenge.

Curator Peter Eleey has stated that "curating is, at base, not simply an act of selection or arrangement, but an act of use and control" (Eleey 2013, 115), justifying this statement as follows:

Expression is an artist's fundamental act; use is a curator's. Just as we would defend an artist absolute freedom to express themselves, so I would argue on behalf of a curator's ability to use whatever they want, however they want to use it [...] We ought to be able to rectify a basic position of curatorial humility, but also reserve for ourselves the freedom to reflect and model the times and cultures in which we work in ways that may sometimes be as discomfiting as the conditions we take as subjects—and prepare to be judged accordingly. (ibid., 118–9)

With a degree of generalisation, one could note a certain tendency in curators' attitudes towards their role and their responsibilities: whereas conservators seem to be in need of shielding their decisions and acts by either formal regulations or a kind of team endorsement, curators seem to allow themselves to rely more openly on creativity and improvisation. Let us consider a concrete example. In his essay *Making New*, critic, art historian and curator Andrew Wilson refers to his practice of exhibiting particular historical works which, as he notes, have the need to be remade inscribed within them — although most of them sculptural (Wilson 2007, 198). Wilson describes the way he approaches such works as events: "there was never going to be one particular object that somehow stood for the work, but instead a continuum of always rather different works", acknowledging further that "in being remade, meanings shifted" (ibid.). It is quite revealing that Wilson discusses the process of exhibiting these works and of making all relevant decisions without any reference to conservation, artist's intent, or defining properties. He, instead, refers to the overall process as one of "making new", in this way alluding to a rather creative and quite autonomous act.

The cases so far discussed allow us to trace some connecting threads between different curators' attitudes, while acknowledging that curators' approach to the challenge of perpetuating contemporary artworks is greatly varied. In particular, the following attitudes

towards perpetuation seem to be variably manifested: perpetuation is acknowledged as a challenge that requires collaborative research, discourse, networks and new methodologies; or it is considered as part of a curator's mundane tasks; or as a personal responsibility; or even, as an opportunity to engage creatively with the artwork.

Varied attitudes towards documentation

Focusing on the key topic of an artwork's research and of the relevant archives and documentation, different important issues need to be explored: these relate to the ways in which information is generated, collected and used; the attitudes with regard to the ownership of information; as well as the kinds of information that are regarded as relevant (including here issues of reflectivity).

As part of a curator's role, research constitutes a vast area with many different research subjects and methodologies. Notably, analyses of curatorial research in the relevant discourse usually do not refer to research about the defining properties of an artwork. For instance, in an essay on curatorial research Simon Sheikh unravels the curatorial as "a specific system of knowledge production" (Sheikh 2013, 35), where the aesthetic and the research that concerns it are used "as tools for investigating something other than art" – referring, in particular, to "politics proper and sociology" (ibid., 34).

Yet, although it might not be a prominent subject in the curatorial discourse, a contemporary artwork does require for its perpetuation a multifaceted research regarding its defining properties and curators are often engaged in it. In particular, as already explored in the previous chapters, documentation (the process of collecting, generating and archiving information about an artwork) is a key process for museums that work with contemporary artworks. The ways in which curators contribute to documentation-as-process, as well as the ways in which they approach documentation-as-information, are, however, widely varied.

A notable case is that of Harald Szeemann, who built a hugely important archive in the course of his career (from 1957 to 2005), which is now owned by Getty Research Institute. Szeemann's archive "encompasses approximately 1,500 linear feet of archival research files, containing letters, ephemera, prints, drawings, floor plans, date books, videotapes, and a complete photographic record documenting Szeemann's projects and the artists with whom he was associated".¹⁸⁴ What is very interesting about this case is that, apart from the

¹⁸⁴ See: www.getty.edu/research/special_collections/notable/szeemann.html [accessed 26 August 2019].

documentation that Szeemann collected while working independently, he took with him the documentation he produced in his eight-year directorship in Kunsthalle Bern (1961 to 1969) when he left the position: as it has been reported, “he took the documentation on exhibitions and the works, and the correspondence with the artists” (Derieux 2007, 39). This act of Szeemann indicates that he, most likely, considered the documents that he collected as a director of Kunsthalle Bern as his own body of work; or else, that he approached documentation, in a way, as an endeavour stemming from a personal interest and initiative and not as an institutional duty.

Szeemann’s Kunsthalle Bern archive story is not meant to suggest that curators in general approach the perpetuation of the contemporary artwork as a private task of personal interest; or as a task that does not require the sharing of information, ideas and authority with other stakeholders. The story is rather meant to illustrate the fact that curators’ approach to documentation is greatly varied. SFMOMA Media Curator Rudolf Frieling confirmed this insight, acknowledging in his interview that archiving the unrecorded information he has in his head is not customarily part of his routine:

One of the things that obviously all institutions struggle with is to compile records and traces of histories. While a lot of information may be in my head, I rarely take the time to actually write it down. Unless you are prompted to write a text about a work... (Theodoraki and Frieling 2018)

As Frieling implies, documentation takes time and, when it is not imposed by an institution as a primary responsibility, it can easily be neglected. Different institutions have different documentation structures and protocols, to which curators (as well as all other employees involved) need to mainly attune their practice. Let us consider, for instance, the documentation that curators conduct as part of Tate’s acquisition process.

When an artwork is considered by a museum for acquisition, this is usually a key moment for its documentation. In her interview, Tate curator Elana Crippa described in detail the research that curators need to conduct for a work to be accessioned for the Tate collection. During the lengthy accessioning process, curators are required to collect information from various sources and to produce two different documents: at a first stage of the accession the “Discussion Note” and at the final stage (when a work has been discussed between curators and directors and it is decided that accession is desired and possible) the “Full Trustees Note” that, as the title indicates, is also the document that will be presented to the trustees for the final

approval of the accession. In these two documents, considered conjointly, curators cover the artwork from multiple angles. They introduce the work in general terms; they present its components; they provide photographs; they indicate associated costs and space requirements for future instantiations (addressing also the practical feasibility of instantiating the work at the Tate); they address health and safety issues and propose ways in which those can be dealt with; they report on the condition of materials and their projected life span; they provide details about the provenance of the work; they analyse the reasons for acquiring the work and why the work is of national importance; they describe how the work can be used in Tate's displays in relation to other works in the collection; they list the work's exhibition history; they provide an overview of how the work has been presented in other venues, as well as reports on how it has been received by audiences; and they also offer their interpretation about the work.

Elena Crippa positioned the curator at Tate in a leading role in the artwork's documentation process. However, discussing the significance of documentation and her extended role in the process, Crippa made no reference to the documentation of decision-making, an area, that as discussed in the previous chapters, is signalled as of great importance in the conservation discourse. Glenn Wharton in his interview had actually made a relevant comment on the matter:

We [conservators] want to document all the steps that led us to making the decisions and even document our justifications for these decisions we made, so that people can come along in the future and know what we did and why we did it. And I don't think curators and artists focus on that so much. (Theodoraki and Wharton 2016)

In the case of Crippa, documentation seems to be approached as a primary research on the artwork and a process of collecting information from the artist, and this brings the curator in charge. Crippa notes, "as curators we always have this role of liaising with the artists and the families and the estates" and explains the details of such interaction as follows:

There is this conversation between museum curators and the artist and whoever works with the artist in their studio, or the dealers, who have a very specific conversation about how a work needs to be presented, what is to be kept, what are all the variables. [...] As Tate, we, for example, for all artworks, or even for video work, we go back to the artist, invite them back in and film and document these

interviews that we conduct, to make sure what are the specific requirements and parameters for showing the work. To be very specific, also, about the future of the work, if the existing support, for example in the case of film, had to become defunct, what we could do to change that. (Theodoraki and Crippa 2018)

When Crippa was asked to specify “who are the people at the Tate that take part in these discussions with the artist?” she responded without hesitation “the curators”. She added that in the case of moving image or photography or installations, conservators have a template with specific questions which they “ask us, as curators, to send to the artists or their representatives”. From Crippa’s answers it becomes clear that in the communication with the artists and their representatives Tate is exclusively represented by its curators. Christine Frohnert similarly noted during her interview that “institutions would like to have the curator being the only point of contact for the artist” (Theodoraki and Frohnert 2018). However, the situation seems to be different at the Guggenheim: as noted in Chapter II, Joanna Phillips reported in her interview that in Guggenheim “the conservation department is holding the main responsibility to make sure that we have all that info that we need for the future display in the collection” (Theodoraki and Phillips 2016). Furthermore, Phillips discussed in length the artist interviews that take place at the Guggenheim, in which the conservation department has a leading role. Guggenheim curator Nat Trotman confirmed Phillips’s accounts and, further, remarked that there is a shift in museums’ practices, as conservators “have a much more direct relationship with artists than they would have before,” adding that this is of benefit for the artists (Theodoraki and Trotman 2018).

However, as will be discussed in the following section, even in those cases where there is a shift in the role of the conservators—one that brings them in closer contact with the artist and opens up their research to encompass the artwork’s defining properties,— curators are still the main decision-makers in the perpetuation process. Further, the collaboration of the two roles is still subject to hierarchical structures that seem to be deep-rooted.

IV. Collaboration: a hierarchical order

Curators’ perception of roles

As noted in the previous Chapter, conservators claim to have expanded the focus of their expertise beyond the physical condition of the artwork and towards a more holistic contribution

to the artwork's perpetuation. However, curators who have collaborated extensively with conservators for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks, when interviewed, attributed to conservators a very clear focus in protecting artworks from *physical deterioration*. Curator Elena Crippa (Tate) made the point rather boldly and a long quote is merited:

I think the role of the conservator is different at different stages and in different activities, but certainly, during the acquisitions, is making sure that the work we are taking into the collection is safe, is not dangerous for any other work in the collection; has a minimum longevity, will not deteriorate too quickly and if we know it will deteriorate (or the support it is mounted on, or some components, sort of need changing each time), that it is enough discussion with the artist or the representative to make sure that in the future we would be able to look after the work and present it in the best possible way. Like in the case of photographic prints, that they haven't deteriorated, asking questions about "are we acquiring the right prints? Should we be looking on different prints?" [...]

Once the work is in the collection, the issue becomes much more about making sure that the work is stored in a way that will guarantee safe keeping. And then when the work is not stored but taken into the exhibition, in a way, again, making sure that it is not susceptible to degradation and damage while is being installed and this goes everything from issues about barriers, or glazing, or light exposure, or other issues. [...] And, again, there are other duties in terms of reviewing works and in doing specific house-keeping in terms of cleaning, in terms of framing (if framing gets damaged or something happened) and any other possible need of restoration and so forth. [...]

Truly they [conservators] are not concerned about the interaction [between the audience and the work], it is mostly about how we can minimise or completely dissipate that interaction. While we [curators] are all about that interaction, it is about how we present the work physically in the best possible way in terms of the interpretation discourse that surrounds it, in terms of other ways of engaging with the work, so, in that sense we are a lot different. [...] The work exists much more in a silo for them, and for us is the opposite, it's all about, how do you make that work accessible, visible, enjoyable, how do you open up its interpretations, or meanings, or interactions, or historical relevance and so forth. So, it's all about the

opposite in a way, we are all about opening up the work to the physical, intellectual (whatever) experience of the audience.

I honestly think the job of a curator is that of being knowledgeable and sensitive and responsive to the very particular challenging constraints and possibilities of the specificity of the work that you're dealing with. [...] You know, you do things out of habit, you will tend to show a painting in a certain way, because it's a habit, and you will show sculpture or performance and installation also in a particular way, because it's a habit. Because as a museum we have acquired a particular way of thinking: we create temporality; and structures; and timing (for execution of performance). And I think our job is just to be very sensitive to what is part and integral to the work and what, in a way, is habit in the curatorial practice and can be questioned and needs to be re-assessed each time we show something. (Theodoraki and Crippa 2018)

Crippa, as quoted, notes that conservators are not particularly concerned about the interaction between the work and the audience. SFMOMA Photography Curator Clément Chéroux pushed this insight to the extreme, claiming that conservators' preoccupation with protecting the work from physical deterioration reaches a point where conservators would prefer to keep a work in storage than having it presented in an exhibition:

I have the feeling that (I am sure that you've already seen that situation) the conservator is always taking the position that is kind of a caricature, because he is always "plus royaliste que le roi"¹⁸⁵. They are always pushing hard to not show the work, to keep it in the storage. And the work of the curator is to make it available to the public in respecting the position of the conservator to not endanger the work. Being a curator is working between light and dark, there is a dark side and there is a light side and my position is in the middle, the position of the conservator is in the dark side. (...) I am using this metaphor of the dark side and the light side because for photography the conservator is always advocating for not putting the works on light.

My role is to do my best to keep the work available for the public but also to keep it for the future generations. So, my role is about tension between present and future

¹⁸⁵ English translation from French: "more royalist than the king".

and my role is also to try to find a common ground between the recommendation of the conservator and the will of the artist. (Theodoraki and Chéroux 2018)

Nat Trotman, however, holds a different view from those of Crippa and Chéroux, ascribing to the conservator a leading role in collection care; when asked whether within collection care he includes the identification of the artwork's defining properties, Trotman responded positively:

Yes. Not that the curator is uninvolved, but I think of that as being a task that the conservator takes the lead on and the curator supports. Whereas in terms of identifying new works, like creating a mission for the collection strategy, a strategy for the collecting practices, I think that's something where the curator takes the lead and the conservator has more of the supporting role. So, it sort of flips a little bit. We both work together on both, and we both advise each other on both, but in terms of identifying what becomes art history, the story of art history that the museum is being told, the curators are the lead on that process. [...] Once something is acquired [the conservator's role] is actually caring and understanding what the terms of that piece are in terms of its maintenance and care for the future. So, it is important that the conservator be involved in the identification in so far as we know what we are getting into when we make a decision based on historical models and it's important that once it's in the collection and it's been cared for it's important that the curator be involved so that the conservator is supported and has the liaison with the artist and the rest of the infrastructure of the museum to help that move forward. (Theodoraki and Trotman 2018)

SFMOMA curator Sarah Roberts also discussed the conservator's role during her interview, but there was an interesting shift in her response. Roberts at first described conservators as carrying the sort of knowledge that pertains exclusively to hard science and techniques:

My role is to really be thinking about the integrity of the artwork in an exhibition setting, the integrity of the artwork as the artist would have seen it, I think very often curators have either spend more time talking to the artist, or looking at exhibition history and kind of aesthetic sensibilities and in a way a curator almost speaks for an absent artist. And the conservators bringing more of the technical, scientific, chemical understanding to the table, although, as I am sure you have

seen, increasingly, they are talking to artists as well, and we are talking to them together. So, there is definitely a lot of overlap when that happens, but I guess I also think about display options that might allow something to be shown even if it is not in perfect condition. Whether that is placement, or lighting, or somehow to kind of keep it alive and keep it in the galleries, without a significant intervention. I guess that is how I would define my own role, as thinking about exhibition opportunities and options and then thinking about just kind of the integrity and the art-historical context around the object that might inform decision-making about its treatment. (Theodoraki and Roberts 2018)

However, after we had concluded our discussion and just as I was about to switch off the voice recorder, Roberts referred to the case of Guggenheim conservator Francesca Esmay (Conservator, Panza Collection at the Guggenheim), commenting:

I was just thinking that for few artists there are conservators who've done so much research, not just on the technical and the physical and the material considerations, but on the artist's history of installations and their whole kind of philosophy and their aesthetics, where the conservator could kind of be the expert for both spheres of consideration, the art historical, the artistic integrity and the material. (ibid.)

The noted views of the four museum curators on the conservator's role are certainly divergent. But perhaps this diversity mirrors the very diversity of the conservator's role, as this is hinted, for instance, by Glenn Wharton:

Some of the characterisation of conservators as being, if not small minded, being very negative and resistant to allowing people to touch. Allowing people to use artworks, allowing artworks to change from one iteration to the next; I think it is somewhere true, there are many conservators who are resistant to all of that. But the field is diverse so there is a lot of voices out there. (Theodoraki and Wharton 2016)

Of course, it is not just the conservation field that is diverse: it should perhaps be clear thus far that different curators conceive differently of their own role and their responsibilities. As an effect, the collaboration between curators and conservators cannot but vary from case to case.

Art historian and conservation scholar Rita Macedo has remarked that contemporary art exposes an inherent conflict between the roles of curators and conservators: a conflict that, she claims, stems from their different understanding of the functioning of artworks in relation to time (Macedo, 2006). Conflicts aside, the heritage community has often been addressing contemporary art perpetuation as a shared responsibility between the roles of curators and conservators.¹⁸⁶ An actual testimony to this can be the VoCA workshop that was offered at MoMA, NY in May 2017.¹⁸⁷ The workshop “Caring For Time-Based Media Artworks in Collections” had the requirement that the application for attendance was joint and, specifically, submitted by two practitioners working together: a curator and a conservator (or, otherwise a collection-care staff member). By setting this requirement, the two institutions, VoCA and MoMA, were in effect stressing that the perpetuation of certain kinds of artworks *needs to be approached as a shared responsibility, necessitating close collaboration*. But is such responsibility indeed shared in actual practice? The analysis so far gives us reason to be wary — and, as the remainder of this Chapter will indicate, rightly so. But first, we need to gain some insight on the specifics of collaboration between curators and conservators in actual museum practice.

When museum professionals from Guggenheim, Tate and SFMOMA were asked to describe their collaboration with their colleagues (curators with conservators and conservators with curators), in most cases the professionals from the two departments explained that they have neither frequent, nor regular meetings with their colleagues: they would instead meet, only, if a particular artwork’s acquisition, treatment, or installation required it.¹⁸⁸ This kind of arrangement explains the fact that the two departments are not usually in physical proximity to each other. In the case of both the Guggenheim and the Tate, the two departments are based on different buildings (for instance, in Manhattan, the building where curators are is seven kilometres away from the one where conservators are). While, in the case of SFMOMA, although registrars and the educational department are located on the same floor with curators, conservators are located on the floor below.

¹⁸⁶ See, for instance: Ramsay-Jolicoeur and Wainright 1990 and Basilio et al. 2008.

¹⁸⁷ See: www.mediaconservation.io/workshop-1 [accessed 20 February 2018].

¹⁸⁸ The one exception is the case of SFMOMA Team Media, where the two teams would normally have one scheduled meeting every month, irrespective of events like acquisition, treatment and installation.

Sharing her experience of working with the conservation department, SFMOMA curator Sarah Roberts described a collaboration focused on the physical condition of the artwork's materials:

Where I have worked with conservation most closely has been to understand when a work needs to be treated, when we know that it has had a loss or some kind of damage or that it has had condition change over time just through aging processes. To work with conservation to understand what it is the nature of the change, what is possible, in terms of treatment options and to get an understanding from them, kind of ethically what feels right to them, in terms of a level of intervention, versus letting things age a bit. (Theodoraki and Roberts 2018)

Roberts added that in preparation of such meetings with conservators "the curatorial team would have looked for examples of how the artwork was installed previously, and archival photos of what the surface looked like" (ibid.). With regard to the installation process, Roberts provided the example of a Rauschenberg exhibition, where many of the works and their elements have variable positioning that had to be determined in collaboration with the conservators: "some of what we would be talking about is 'if the bucket can go anywhere and the chain is going to extend from the piece into the bucket, is it safe to have it this far away? Is that too much tension?'" (ibid.). Roberts further explained that during installation she would discuss with conservators issues such as barriers, protection and light levels, clarifying that the conservator's input in these discussions would pertain to safety, whereas her input would be from the point of aesthetics.

Rudolf Frieling, describing his collaboration with Martina Haidvogel (SFMOMA Associate Media Conservator at the time), explained that Haidvogel's contribution during the installation process was focused on the technical components of the artwork as media and Haidvogel would not be involved in broader decisions regarding the installation of the work in the space.

She would be involved in getting the media in a format that is considered to be the best, in maintaining the work, keeping it up and running. [...] What I always appreciate is her eye and her expertise in looking at something that I sometimes don't see that there is a flaw whereas she spends a lot more time with that. [...]

Image quality, sound quality, for example... technical components. (Theodoraki and Frieling 2018)

Elena Crippa from Tate explained that, in preparation of an exhibition, she will inspect, together with conservators, all the works planned for display (Theodoraki and Crippa 2018). Crippa also made reference to negotiations about barriers and the work's protection:

EC: We spot issues that we are unhappy with either because of the glazing, the framing, works needing cleaning, works that we are not sure whether they would be problematic when it comes to installation moment and then we also have lots of discussions about installation requirements. So, this is *typical* for sculpture and installation, that as curators we often see things differently from conservators, in particular when it comes to artists who we know would have really despised the idea of seeing their work behind barriers (or ropes, or whatever we use), and then we need to find an agreement with collection care and conservators and us.

MT: Would you defend different aspects of the work in this discussion? Because from what you say, I hear that you will try to defend the artist's position more than the conservator's.

EC: Well, *absolutely*. I mean, this is now in our galleries,¹⁸⁹ a beautiful work by Antony Caro, it is currently installed. You *cannot* show this work behind barriers. But it is, theoretically, an indemnity requirement that this sculpture is not accessible and is barriered. And then, we need to come to an agreement, collectively. Of course, it's one of our major duties to safeguard our collection and to fulfil indemnity requirements, but it is also one of our duties to be true to the nature of the work. [...] Collection care/registrars will be worried about, mostly, indemnity requirements, and are the people who liaise with Arts Council who established the current indemnity for us [Tate], because they will need to discuss with them and ask for an exception to current indemnity requirements. Conservators will mostly be worried about the safety of the work, but will also have in mind the safety of visitors. (ibid.)

¹⁸⁹ Elena Crippa points to a postcard on the wall featuring a photograph of the artwork *Window* (1966/1967) by Anthony Caro.

With regard to the Tate acquisition process, Crippa noted that, if curators do not identify issues in the artwork that require consultation, conservators are not involved in the process. The point when conservators are, by default, involved in the accessioning process is when they are invited to inspect the artwork, after it has been agreed for purchase and is brought into the museum to be viewed by trustees and curators. Crippa specified that the conservator's inspection concerns the work's physical properties: conservators examine the physical condition of the artwork's materials and whether the work is safe to store with other artworks in the collection.

Conservators look at the work for also very simple reasons, if there is a pest, it might be put in quarantine, for example, and then the accessioning process is postponed. So, it has to be checked and we need to make sure that it can enter the door of the collection, that it is not bringing in potential threats. And then, more specifically, looking at the status of the work. (ibid.)

While discussing their collaboration with conservators, the three curators position the conservators as the technical brains. At the same time, they touch upon some distinguishing traits of the conservator's role: Frieling comments on the ability of his collaborator to perceive more minute details in the quality of a broadcast, while Roberts and Crippa refer to conservators' preoccupation with protecting the work physically, when on display. Ultimately, it can be observed that the curators are insinuating that the two roles have diverse priorities, and as Crippa notes, this can lead to disagreements.

Conservation scholar and scientist Tom Learner, Head of Contemporary Art Research at GCI, discusses the collaboration between conservators and curators as being hindered by a challenge in communication:

[C]onservators and art historians/curators often seem to speak two very different languages (and it is therefore rare to get a true dialogue going); [...] the discussion tends to remain rather broad with a barage [*sic*] of conservation problems, artists and materials all being debated at the same time (and it is therefore also rare to get beyond the periphery of any of the specific issues). (Learner 2008)

Despite of any disagreements or problems in communication, a decision needs to be made and, in the day-to-day practice of institutions, curators seem to maintain a particular authoritative position that extends to decision-making. In case studies discussed in literature, it is most often indicated that it is the curator who has the final word in conservation and installation processes.¹⁹⁰ I asked SFMOMA Head of Conservation Michelle Berger who the professional is in SFMOMA that has the last word in deciding if something is in an exhibitable state and how it can be displayed. Berger pointed at the curator: “I think that is ultimately a curator’s decision but I think it is incredibly collaborative here, and it depends on the object, and depends on the collecting department” (Theodoraki and Berger 2018). Rudolf Frieling noted in a similar vein: “it’s an institutional issue, wherever you go, a lot of people shy away from making decisions, and it typically is the privilege and also the burden of the curator to say ‘no, we are doing it this way’” (Theodoraki and Frieling 2018). Frieling seems to accept the role of being the decision-maker unassumingly, without claiming any special entitlement. However, as we will see below, Jill Sterrett defended the curator’s authority in having the last word in decision-making. I posed to Sterrett the following question: “do you feel that the curator has the last word in the installation processes, even when the artwork’s particular interaction with the exhibition space is actually a defining property of the work?” Sterrett responded as follows:

Here [in SFMOMA], I would say yes, they do, I think that’s culturally, yes, they do. I think that they seek a lot of advice from people along the way. [...] I think that the construction of space is something that is a real collaborative effort here. And I do think that over the years, it’s useful for everyone to have even a hand to what it means to be responsible for a whole exhibition in order to honour the curatorial role. It’s a huge weight on shoulders to kind of conceive of a show, choose the check list, install it. It is your brain that’s on display, right? So, I have watched that, and felt it from time to time with certain projects, and it has made me realise “I am so *not* a curator” and “what you do is so awesome, and how can we help?” because it’s such a responsibility that they keep. That’s the way I view it. So, yes, I do think that curators need to enact their vision. (Theodoraki and Sterrett 2018)

¹⁹⁰ See, for instance: Schubert 2009; Domínguez Rubio 2014; Wielocha 2016; Wharton 2016.

When I broadened my question and asked Jill Sterrett if she feels that there is one role within the SFMOMA museum structure that is more focused on “identifying and establishing the defining properties of an artwork”, Sterrett again pointed to the curator:

I would have to call out curators and then kind of one A, one B (not even one two) curators and conservator at this museum work very closely on that level. But I would have to say in all honesty, I think curators take the lead in that... I think.
(ibid.)

Interestingly, in the case of Guggenheim, although both Joanna Phillips and Nat Trotman acknowledge that conservators are leading the research with regard to an artwork’s defining properties, Joanna Phillips pointed to the curator as the one with the last word in installation decisions:

If there are different opinions, then the conservator’s role here is more of an observatory role. I am not the person who has the last word on the decision how something is being shown. [...] the curator has most authority in that aspect because he or she is responsible for the show. The exhibition is his or her responsibility, only indirectly mine as well. (Theodoraki and Phillips 2016)

Berger, Sterrett and Phillips thus acknowledge the curator’s authority to the last word, which they seem to regard as justifiable. However, one may wonder whether there is a conflict of jurisdictions between conservators and curators — one inherent to the nature of most contemporary art. Art critic, media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys (2009) has claimed that “contemporary art can be understood primarily as an exhibition practice”, explaining that:

The material support of the installation medium is the space itself. [...] The installation transforms the empty, neutral, public space into an individual artwork — and it invites the visitor to experience this space as the holistic, totalizing space of an artwork. Anything included in such a space becomes a part of the artwork simply because it is placed inside this space. [...] The artistic installation is a way to expand the domain of the sovereign rights of the artist from the individual art object to that of the exhibition space itself. (Groys 2009, 3)

It is certainly a key function of many contemporary, variable artworks to claim control over the exhibition space, integrating it as one of its intrinsic elements. In these cases, art constitutes an exhibition practice, or as Groys puts it: “the act of art production coincides with the act of its presentation” (ibid.). However, it is commonly acknowledged that one of the main roles of a curator is the administration of the exhibition space. Curators have the authority of deciding the configuration of artworks within the exhibition space: in other words, they are institutionally in charge of an artwork’s presentation. Therefore, when the artwork transgresses its borders to encompass the exhibition space —or as Groys puts it: when art becomes an exhibition practice and art production coincides with the act of presentation— the artwork claims agency over the work territory of curators. But in this case, how can conservators claim the role of safeguarding the defining properties of a contemporary artwork, without claiming authority over the work territory of curators? This is a rhetorical question that this thesis does not attempt to provide an answer to. It is raised here in order to give an idea of the ways in which contemporary artworks can challenge traditional divides of expertise and knowledge production, and complicate the interactions and hierarchies between traditional roles.

Hierarchies

Fernando Domínguez Rubio in his essay “Preserving the unpreservable: docile and unruly objects at MoMA” refers to a direct link that exists between institutional power and a specific knowledge production. In particular, he states that in the case of oil paintings “[curators’] monopoly over aesthetic decisions and meaning making processes” reinforces a “peculiar hierarchy of knowledge and power in which conservators are subsumed under curators” (Domínguez Rubio 2014, 627). In the case of media-artworks, however, things can be rather different: according to Rubio, their unruly and unstable nature “compel conservators to go beyond their traditional roles and face decisions that affect the very definition of the artwork as well as its meaning” (ibid., 636). From Rubio’s perspective, this can bring about a shift in the museum’s traditional hierarchical structures. But has any such shift actually occurred thus far? Jill Sterrett and Pip Laurenson, who have a long experience collaborating with curators in a museum environment, were confronted with this issue in the course of their interviews. From their responses, it is understood that, if there is already a shift in the hierarchies of the museums that work with contemporary artworks, then certainly this shift is not yet a radical one. Jill Sterrett, in particular, noted that curators continue to have a powerful position in a museum’s hierarchy, owing to their position of being the decision-makers: “you go back to the whole idea

of hierarchies and I don't actually believe that they are truly flattened, I think that curators play a role in institutions that we continue to have to honour as being kind of 'where the buck stops'”¹⁹¹ (Theodoraki and Sterrett 2018). Much like Sterrett, Pip Laurenson noted that curators produce a highly valued type of knowledge in the museum and this influences the museum's hierarchies:

[I]n terms of the hierarchies within most museums, and who is seen as the keeper of knowledge, I think that curators still hold that hierarchical position in our museums. So how that is usually manifested, is that certain types of knowledge are valued more highly than other types of knowledge about the collection. (Theodoraki and Laurenson 2018)

So, to conclude: although the challenge of perpetuation of contemporary artworks may require close collaboration between curators and conservators, the reality of museum practice (with few notable exceptions) does not seem to correspond to this ideal. At least the instances of collaboration that we have examined seem to suggest two general trends: conservators are either perceived as being preoccupied and entrusted solely with technical issues and issues of safety; or their contribution in issues of perpetuation is acknowledged and valued, but is still subject to hierarchical structures. The common thread among these two trends is attitudinal: in both cases, curators seem to assume (and be granted) an authoritative —and even an authorial— role with characteristic ease and this can have significant repercussions for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks. To understand the underpinnings of the role that curators tend to assume in a museum environment —but also the underpinnings of the mindset with which they approach issues of perpetuation— it is important to consider their training.

V. Training

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, it was during the 1990s that the first curatorial courses appeared in Europe and the United States,¹⁹² whereas until that point most curators would have emerged from the discipline of art history. Thirty years later, De Appel, RCA and CCS Bard are joined by many more institutions in offering curatorial training. However, the three pioneers

¹⁹¹ The phrase “where the buck stops” refers to the individual who takes the responsibility for all decisions made about a matter.

¹⁹² At: De Appel, RCA and CCS Bard.

continue to be leaders in the field and for this reason I will explore curatorial training through their examples. De Appel, RCA and CCS Bard are dissimilar types of institutions. De Appel is a contemporary art institute, founded in 1975, presented as bringing together “people, objects and ideas to explore the unknown”.¹⁹³ RCA is an art and design university dedicated to postgraduate studies, it dates back to 1837¹⁹⁴ and it praises itself as “the world’s most influential postgraduate institution of art and design”.¹⁹⁵ CCS Bard,¹⁹⁶ founded in 1990, is comprised of a Museum, a Research Center and a School, which “collectively explore the critical potential of the institutions and practices of exhibition-making”.¹⁹⁷

The three institutions approach training from different perspectives; researching their curricula can thus provide an idea of what is on offer in terms of contemporary art curatorial training in Europe and the States.¹⁹⁸ To attempt a summary, in the three programmes I observed a focus on the same four areas: (a) integrating participants in a network of powerful figures in the field; (b) cultivating participants’ intellectual and critical capacity by involving them, intensely, in social and political discourses; (c) challenging participants’ communication and writing skills; and, (d) providing a demanding hands-on experience by implementing public projects, in collaboration with a well-established art institution. I also observed that all three institutions are rather diligent in publicising their successful alumni,¹⁹⁹ thus stressing the importance of the curator’s being an acclaimed individual.

Although there are substantial differences between the different programmes, none of the three institutions seem to directly address or directly prepare curators as stewards or caretakers of collections. In fact, Jessica Morgan has commented on this issue:

Notably absent from most curatorial courses is any real engagement with what is in fact the fundamental cornerstone of the museum: its collection. When students are encouraged to focus in this direction they inevitably lapse into “exhibition lite,”

¹⁹³ See: <http://deappel.nl/en/about> [accessed 26 August 2019].

¹⁹⁴ Back then with the name “Government School of Design”.

¹⁹⁵ See: www.rca.ac.uk/more/about-rca/our-history/ [accessed 26 August 2019].

¹⁹⁶ CCS Bard is part of the Bard College, a big American university with a faculty of 297, offering both undergraduate and graduate studies in a great number of areas, from Arts and language to social and hard sciences. Bard was founded in 1860, then with the name “St. Stephen’s College”.

¹⁹⁷ See: <https://brantfoundation.org/programs/bard-college/> [accessed 26 August 2019].

¹⁹⁸ See: Appendix VI (page 194).

¹⁹⁹ To name just a few of the mentions: curator Adam Szymczyk (Artistic Director of documenta 14) and curator Annie Fletcher (Chief Curator at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands) — De Appel’s CP; curator Kitty Scott (Deputy Director and Chief Curator at The National Gallery of Canada) and curator November Paynter (Director of Programs at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto, Canada) — RCA MA; curator Cecilia Alemani (Director of the 59th Venice Biennale) and curator Manuela Moscoso (Curator of the Liverpool Biennial 2020) — CCS Bard.

organizing the available works into tired thematic groupings better suited to the small-scale Kunsthalle (if at all).’ Given the crisis in funding that most museums now face, it is an opportune time to start to pay attention to the potential of the collection, but also to the challenges faced given the vastly expanded field of production now under consideration. (Morgan 2013, 25)

Jessica Morgan is a curator who, in fact, does not see specialised curatorial courses in a positive light: “of all the things that can be studied, curating seems almost a complete waste of time, and it is alarming to think that the majority of curators now being employed emerge from this limited purview...” (ibid., 27). Morgan signals an alarm that narrowing the field only to those institutionally certified as eligible, reinforces hierarchical thinking and hinders the possibility of new approaches emerging. Morgan, having herself an educational background in art history,²⁰⁰ even argues that the most celebrated contributions to the field of curating “have often emerged from disciplines other than art history” and points to specific cases of curators who came to the field from theatre, architecture, politics and economics, poetry, or were even self-educated²⁰¹ (ibid., 24). The fact that individuals coming from different disciplines can claim the role of curator can be seen to suggest perhaps that the role attracts and rewards particular personalities – that is, individuals who have the audacity, self-confidence and personal charisma to both stand out and to impose themselves and their ideas beyond any kind of external formal verification.

A curator who shares Morgan’s feelings is Adriano Pedrosa, who warns against curatorial programmes, claiming that they are “prone to produce similar, cookie cutter outcomes” (Pedrosa 2013, 131). According to Pedrosa, “If a certain theory, topic, or art becomes fashionable or the norm, it is better to stay clear from it” (ibid.).

To conclude, the curator of contemporary art, either by training or by personality, seems to possess: innovative and unconventional ideas; the confidence in making decisions; a capacity and interest in contributing to the cultural, social and political discourse; an aptitude in creating and maintaining social relationships (thus nurturing the extended networks that form the artworld); the ability to undertake a variety of diverse tasks. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that neither the curricula of curatorial training, nor the professionals who condemn

²⁰⁰ Morgan has a BA degree in Renaissance Art History from King’s College, Cambridge and an Art History MA from Courtauld Institute where her dissertation was on 1960s British and American art.

²⁰¹ Morgan refers specifically to Harald Szeemann, Francesco Bonami, Jens Hoffmann, Jean Leering, Chris Dercon, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Carlos Basualdo, Okwui Enwezor, Lawrence Alloway, Bryan Robertson and Walter Hopps.

this training, address contemporary art curators as stewards of artworks. This lack of focus on stewardship may have important repercussions for the perpetuation of artworks; my field research, presented in the following Chapter, confirms this insight.

Chapter IV.

A case study: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum

In order to track the challenges that contemporary art poses to traditional stewardship roles and to point towards a solution, in the previous chapters: (a) I explored different theoretical frameworks with regard to perpetuating contemporary artworks, which point towards specific methodologies that can support museums in this mission; and (b) I examined the existing literature on the professional museum roles involved in the perpetuation of contemporary artworks and I presented relevant testimonies of professionals, as these were recorded in a series of interviews conducted for the aims of this thesis. However, as many important researchers attest,²⁰² for a research that concerns museum practices it is imperative to examine practices themselves as they take place. The investigation of actual working practices —i.e., the study of a museum's day-to-day routines and its strategies for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks,— can provide valuable information on how stewardship is performed in reality and outside textbooks. An access to the backstage²⁰³ of the museum can reveal how, and by whom, decisions are being made and can shed light to small details about procedures and dynamics.

The aim of this Chapter is to present my observations from my first-person experience working as part of a museum team in the process of installing an exhibition of contemporary artworks.

I. The set-up

For the purposes of this research, from January to April 2017, I worked as a research assistant within the Programming Team of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum (CGM) in Lisbon, Portugal. CGM is part of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF), a private law and public interest corporate body that was established in 1956, following the will of financier, art collector and philanthropist Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian (1869–1955). The CGM collection —

²⁰² See, for instance: Yaneva 2003a and 2003b; Van Saaze 2013 and Domínguez Rubio 2014.

²⁰³ For an analysis of the “backstage and frontstage” dichotomy within a contemporary art museum, see: Van Saaze 2011b.

divided in Founder's²⁰⁴ and Modern— is broad in its scope, ranging from antiquities to design objects and from traditional and modern artworks to contemporary art. The Modern Collection, of which the contemporary artworks are part, is active and continually expanding, and contains artworks in all the different artistic media. The Modern Collection dates back to 1957; however, it was formally established in 1983 and presently consists of over 10.000 artworks from the 20th and the 21st centuries. Around 8000 of the artworks are works on paper, however, the collection also houses many contemporary artworks.

With regard to the main roles that could be seen as relevant to processes of perpetuation, in CGM these are five: Curators (part of the Curatorial Department), Conservators (part of Collections Management Department), the Architects/Designers (part of Programming Department), the Registrar (part of Collections Management Department), and Installation Technicians (part of Programming Department). Below, I will provide some information about the function of these roles within CGM.

Since its establishment in 1983 and until 2015, the CGM Modern Collection did not have a conservation department charged with the care of its holdings: the Conservation Department, which operates in the Gulbenkian since 1969, was exclusively dedicated to the holdings of the Founder's Collection. However, since 2015²⁰⁵, the Conservation Department is, on paper, also in charge of the Modern Collection. At the time of my placement, the CGM Conservation Team consisted of one conservator (acting as the Head of the Department), one Assistant Conservator and one Intern. In relation to the Founder's Collection, the contribution of the Conservation Department can be summarised as follows: (a) performing physical condition assessment and filling in, archiving and making available the relevant reports; (b) performing physical treatments by cleaning and restoring objects; (c) advising on safe environmental conditions for the purposes of storage, travelling and display; (d) designing or approving supportive devices for the object's security and display. From 2015 and up to the

²⁰⁴ The Founder's Collection comprises of Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Islamic and Oriental art, old coins and European paintings and decorative arts. It is a closed collection, with its holdings having been acquired by Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian during his lifetime.

²⁰⁵ What is known today as CGM was built in two phases. The first part opened its doors in 1969 and was dedicated to the Founder's Collection. The second museum site was inaugurated in 1983 under the name Centro de Arte Moderna²⁰⁵ (CAM) and it was created for the purpose of "preserving, investigating and exposing to the public" the Foundation's Modern Collection. From 1983 and until 2015, the two museum sites operated as two individual entities: each site had its own individual departments run by a different team of professionals; the old site and its corresponding team was in charge of the Founder's Collection, while the new site and its corresponding team was in charge of the Modern Collection. In September 2015, curator, art historian and former director of the Tate Britain (London, UK) Penelope Curtis was appointed as Director of the entire CGM. One of the main tasks assigned to the new director was the merging of the former Museum and CAM into one entity with a single operating team that will care for both of the Foundation's collections.

time of the placement, the Conservation Department has the role of performing the services listed above also to the acquisitions that are part of the Modern Collection.

Within CGM, at the time of the placement, there were four curators in charge of the Modern Collection, individually responsible for one of the four categories of the collection: paintings, installations and sculpture, TBM, and works on paper. All four curators had a background in art history. Each curator was found having many different roles simultaneously: being a co-curator in multiple exhibitions that were in various stages between planning and execution, while researching and programming the exhibitions for four years ahead; co-ordinating exhibition publications, as well as related parallel events, including talks and workshops; being in charge of the overall content of publications and the writing of the texts; arranging loans and acquisitions and the related paperwork; being in contact with artists in processes of planning exhibitions; negotiating artist's fees and the budget for the production of exhibitions. At the same time, curators were organising a wide range of peripheral procedures, from the translation of texts to the artworks' transportation, and from planning the artist's travelling to creating the content for exhibition wall texts.

Before discussing the function of other professional roles within CGM, I would like to discuss a terminology issue that exists in Romance-speaking countries with regard to the roles of conservators and curators. This terminology issue is present in CGM, and I believe reflects the challenge of defining the different perpetuation responsibilities that different professional roles have in a museum environment. In Romance-speaking countries, curators can be termed variably as “curadores” and “conservadores”, however, there is actually a difference in the type of curatorial role each of these terms refers to. The term “curador” refers to the professional that has the role of envisioning and curating an exhibition. A “curador” is not necessarily a professional with a background in the visual arts; they can, instead, come from other fields and be invited by an institution to curate a particular exhibition.²⁰⁶ On the other hand, the term “conservador”, when referring to a curator, defines the art professional (most times, an art historian) who is in charge of the artworks *in a collection*.²⁰⁷ Curators with the role of “conservadores” are presented as knowledgeable about the history, significance and condition of individual acquisitions and as responsible in managing the acquisitions' (material, as well

²⁰⁶ This role is referring to a similar role that in English would translate to “independent curator.” The same role in the past in Portugal was termed “commissario.”

²⁰⁷ In CGM, for the role of a curator “conservador” the term “responsavel de obra” (English translation: “responsible for the works”) has also taken effect after the CGM's ISO certification that took place in 2015.

as immaterial) care.²⁰⁸ Within CGM, the terms “curador” and “conservador” are used interchangeably to refer to the museum’s curators, while, at the same time, the terms “restaurador” and “conservador” are used interchangeably to refer to museum’s conservators.²⁰⁹ However, as it will be described below, it can be disputed if any of the professionals in CGM with the title of “conservador” (either curator or conservator) have as their role what Pip Laurenson defined as conservation in 2006: the documentation, understanding and maintenance of an artwork’s defining properties (Laurenson 2006, 9).

To continue with the different CGM professional roles that are relevant to this research, there is the role of architect/designer, who designs and plans the exhibition space. In the case of CGM, the role of the architect is a very involved one, since the Museum is not following the model of the white-cube, but very often opts for elaborate exhibition designs. The architect would be in control of the overall configuration of the space, the distance between artworks, etc; would design the walls, bespoke vitrines, plinths and protective devices; and would choose the colour of walls. The architect would, also, participate in decisions about what an appropriate installation for an artwork is.

The role of the registrar, as performed at CGM, is a technical role: having the responsibility to inventory the acquisitions; to manage the two CGM forms that are to accompany the new acquisitions (the certificate of authenticity and the form that grants image copyrights); to trace and document the location of all the acquisitions at any point in time; and to liaise with artists’ representatives and with loaning institutions for the arrival and dispatch of artworks.

Further, there is the role of the installation technicians, which—in terms of the CGM stewardship practice,—is rather unique. This is a team of seven installers, two of whom have more than 20 years of experience in installing the artworks that are part of the Modern Collection. As it will be explained further on in this Chapter, their long experience with the artworks seems to have bestowed the two senior installers a unique status. The two installers operate with full reliance on their personal memories alone: beyond their official job-description that categorises them as technical operators, they are regarded by CGM as living archives and they seem to substitute formal documentation.

²⁰⁸ In relation to how the role is defined in the literature of a Romance-speaking country see, Desvallées and Mairesse 2011, 581.

²⁰⁹ An inconsistency exists between the following: what term different colleagues use to refer to someone; what term someone uses to define oneself; what term is written on the door of one’s offices; and with what term one is referred to in CGM publications.

The Programming Team, in which the placement took place, is in charge of the exhibitions' programming, planning, design and execution. The Head of the Department is a curator with background in art history. The Department is divided in three teams: the Production Team, that undertakes the production of the exhibitions; the Designing Team, that designs the configuration of the exhibition space, as well as the display devices to be used with the artworks (head of this Team is the architect); while the third Team goes with the title of "Museographic" and is in charge of installing the exhibitions. As a research assistant, my role was to contribute to the process of installing the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3* and to conduct research about specific artworks, upon request.

Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3 (3 March to 18 November 2017) was a semi-permanent exhibition that comprised of 134 artworks that span from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day. The selection included a wide range of artworks, from modern bronze sculptures to kinetic works. With regard to contemporary art, there were artworks with TBM elements, multi-part installations, artworks with perishable elements, artworks that incorporated remnants of performances, artworks that incorporated gelatine silver prints, and also artworks that incorporated the exhibition space as an integral element. I had the opportunity to be involved in a wide range of museum's processes, such as: installation planning, exhibition production, and hands on installing. In what follows, I will concentrate on two cases where I was not directly involved in the artworks' installation process. For these two cases, the Curatorial Team did not regard the installation of the artworks as challenging and I was not requested to either research the works or to be involved in the installation process. The two cases concern the works: *Untitled #336* (2002) by Fernando Calhau (1948–2002) and *TV's Back* (1995) by Alexandre Estrela (born Portugal, 1971).

As it will be described below, the professionals that participated in deciding how the artworks will be installed for the exhibition were the curators, with the support of the exhibition's architect and the senior installation technicians. The involvement of the Conservation Team during the process of installing *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3* was in cleaning and restoring surfaces, supervising the handling of fragile pieces and creating props to secure artworks on frames and platforms.

II. The case of *Untitled #336* by Fernando Calhau

Untitled #336 is a sculptural installation with a specific characteristic that is key in many contemporary artworks: it claims control over its exhibition space and integrates it as one of its intrinsic elements. For this reason, it is a very useful case for exploring the intriguing relationship between artwork and exhibition space and how it can challenge museum professionals in the process of installing the work. Additionally, the CGM installation of *Untitled #336* in the aforementioned exhibition proves to be an appropriate case study for addressing and examining the challenges that a museum can encounter in relation to processes of documentation and archiving.

The object associated with *Untitled #336* is a square-shaped steel tray with attached neon-line-lamps that are shaped in the words of the four cardinal points.²¹⁰ The words are distributed on the four inner sides of the square in the order of north, south, east and west. As described in a thesis by heritage researcher Mafalda Lopes Brito, “only north is placed in line with geographic north”²¹¹ (Brito 2013, 84), thus the sculpture acquires its installation identity by its actualised spatial interplay with the exhibition space. The distribution of the words not in their geographical order (i.e., N E S W) but in the order in which we tend to recall them (i.e., N S E W), materialises a tension between language and space —a tension between human and cosmos— and highlights a ‘conflict’ between different realms. Brito further notes that “this sculpture is placed directly on the floor, without plinth”²¹² (ibid., 85). This condition binds the written cardinal points to the Earth on which they apply and, moreover, intensifies the shared spatial conditioning that exists between art object and percipient.

CGM is the owner and thus the material and intellectual guardian of *Untitled #336*; however, it is bestowed with an additional responsibility. Calhau, before his death in 2002, donated to CGM a substantial part of his life’s work, amounting to 649 artworks. CGM rightly acknowledges the significance of such an act and refers to it in the Museum’s Guide (CGM 2017, 151). By holding the largest and most important collection of the artist’s work, CGM can be rightfully regarded and be approached as the expert institution on Calhau’s oeuvre — the guardian of his practice as a whole. Consequently, the way in which CGM presents an artwork by Calhau has an added authority and it establishes institutional knowledge that the extended museum community will rely on, to guide their future practices.

²¹⁰ See: Image 1 (page 136).

²¹¹ Translated from Portuguese: “Só North é colocado alinhado com o norte geográfico.”

²¹² Translated from Portuguese: “Esta escultura está colocada directamente no chão, sem plinto.”

Untitled #336 was presented in the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3* with its neon-written north point being positioned geographically arbitrarily and with the object placed on an elaborate individual platform,²¹³ acting as a plinth. It is, thus, apparent that the presentation *diverged* from the one that Brito described as constitutive of the piece; consequently, it can be argued that the artwork's authenticity in the given instantiation was compromised. In order to examine this discrepancy from the standpoint of the museum's responsibility in heritage conservation, it is necessary to consider the significance of such a discrepancy in the light of academic heritage discourse; and, further, the way in which the installation decision-making process evolved, the roles that the different professionals played in this process, as well as the types of information they had at their disposal.

As art historian Lúcia Matos declares in her essay "The permanent nature of the ephemeral: strategies for survival", the exhibition constitutes a conservation strategy, as it offers an opportunity to test material conditions, to produce documentation, to undertake research and to reintroduce the work as relevant (Matos 2010). An exhibition is not an isolated incident of no effect to the artworks therein: it is an opportunity to re-enact, re-address, re-confirm and thus stabilise an artwork's defining properties. It is exactly this power that exhibitions have in confirming what constitutes the artwork that can be very problematic for the authenticity of the artwork, when the work is re-enacted in ways that compromise its authenticity. Exhibitions constitute authorised and documented²¹⁴ precedents, they become part of the history and biography of the artwork and are actualised claims about the artwork's properties. In this respect, exhibitions ought to be approached as public enactments of the role of museums as guardians of art heritage.

According to Brito's description, *Untitled #336* is not a self-contained object. *Untitled #336* is completed *only* when in the intended configuration and placement within the exhibition space. As Martha Buskirk argues in her seminal book "Contingent object of contemporary art":

For works that are completed not in the studio but only at the point of their realization in an exhibition or performance space, the existence of the work is linked to its public presentation. [...] If the physicality of many minimalist works is only completed by the activation of the surrounding space, then this is a

²¹³ The platform made of dark grey ply wood has metal elements attached to its four corners, which extend further the periphery of the platform and hold in place an all-encircling extended rope. See: Image 2 (page 136).

²¹⁴ For instance, a photograph of *Untitled #336*, as installed in the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3* is now part of the CGM guide, CGM 2017, 194–5.

contingent physicality that ceases to exist when the elements of the work are disassembled for storage, and can be profoundly compromised by a careless or imprecise arrangement of elements. (Buskirk 2003, 14–15)

Based on Buskirk's argument, the material element of *Untitled #336* —the steel tray with the attached neon parts— constitute inactive parts of a whole that turn into the artwork only when exhibited, and when exhibited under the artist's specified conditions of display. In other words, the steel tray alone does not constitute the artwork. It is useful to examine what the area of compromise is that Buskirk refers to in the quote above (a compromise which also takes place in CGM's instantiation of *Untitled #336*). As analysed in the first Chapter of this thesis, with regard to contemporary artworks, authenticity can no longer be approached as pertaining solely to the material substance of an artwork. The immaterial properties of an artwork — communicated and established by the artist's sanction— constitute further parameters of authenticity. Accordingly, although *Untitled #336* in the aforementioned instantiation is materially authentic, it is both contextually and functionally inauthentic.²¹⁵ The compromise in question can thus be defined as one in *authenticity*.

The people that were involved in the decision-making process of the installation of *Untitled #336* for the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3* were the director of CGM along with the four curators that are in charge of the Modern Collection, the architect (designer) of the exhibition and one of the senior installation technicians.

In the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3*, apart from three artworks, all the floor-based works in the exhibition were not placed directly on the floor, but were positioned, instead, on top of platforms, painted in dark grey. The design of the exhibition was decided by the architect of the exhibition in collaboration with the director of the museum. The platforms were all positioned in parallel to each other and at the same time in parallel to the walls of the exhibition space.

At the beginning of the installation process, the steel tray from *Untitled #336* was placed diagonally on the surface of the platform in a way that the word 'north' faced to the geographical north. However, this initial installation configuration was altered at one point during the installation process and the object was then placed parallel to its imposed platform and arbitrarily in relation to the geographical north. Since I was not present in the decision-

²¹⁵ In relation to the multiple nature of authenticity as historical, conceptual, functional, contextual and in relation to materiality, see for instance, Clavir 2002 and Brokerhof et al. 2011, 97.

making process that altered the initial placement, ten days before the opening of the exhibition I inquired about this development, discussing the issue with the architect of the exhibition. The architect explained that the decision was based on two considerations: first, some of the curators were unhappy with the image of the object not being parallel on the platform and, second, the senior installation technician claimed he could recall the artwork's unofficial title being: "missing the north". In other words, it was decided that a configuration parallel to the platform was visually preferable and, further, it was deemed that an alignment of the two 'norths' was not essential to the piece, and could even be inappropriate.

After the discussion with the architect, I decided to look for more information that could shed light on the artwork's defining properties. The first locus of research was the digital repository (In Arte) used by CGM for archiving and making internally available all the information and documentation for individual entities in the Collection. The information about *Untitled #336* that was available in In Arte was very limited: materials and dimensions, one photograph of the piece with no visual reference to the surrounding space, information about the artwork's exhibition history (titles and dates of exhibitions with no further information about the exhibitions or further images) and information on how and when the work was acquired (donation, 2002). In further research on the literature on Calhau's work, I was unable to locate any reference to a proposition of "missing the north" (acting as an alternative title or otherwise) and most texts didn't refer at all to how the work was intended to be installed. The thesis of Brito (quoted above) was located in a university repository and confirmation of Brito's statements about the installation specifications of the work was found in an earlier text by art historian Margarida B. Alves:²¹⁶

[*Untitled #336*] is a piece which, revealing characteristically minimalist concerns, is not only formed of industrial materials which have not been directly worked upon by the artist, but is installed directly on the floor of the exhibition space, dividing the very plane of action of the spectators, with whom it interacts, demanding not only their visual attention but forcing them to confront a presence in the space, around which they can circulate. However, in this case, the interconnection with the actual space goes beyond a relation established between the work and the physical context in which it is situated, in that the piece must assume a position which allows the word 'north' to be situated to the geographical

²¹⁶ Full name Margarida Brito Alves, modified here to avoid confusion.

north, thus placing itself in an unbounded spatial context, which extends indefinitely beyond the space in which it is exhibited.²¹⁷

Margarida B. Alves is explicit about the requirement that the steel object be presented placed directly on the exhibition floor, as well as about the requirement that the neon “north” be positioned aligned with the geographical north. To my surprise, I located the text by Alves in the official CGF website. The text is publicly available in a section of the website where individual holdings of the collection are presented with images, additional information and descriptive texts about them. As revealed by one of the CGM curators in one of our discussions, the Alves text was produced as part of a particular project, where external researchers were commissioned by CGM to conduct research and write texts about individual artworks in the Modern Collection, in order to be included in the CGF website. What becomes evident with this incident is that the documentation that CGM has on the artworks in their collection can be archived in different repositories²¹⁸ that are not unified and thus the knowledge they hold can be lost.

The phenomenon of knowledge fragmentation within museums is not uncommon. One of the roots of this fragmentation is that museums’ role in relation to knowledge is multifaceted: producing and disseminating knowledge, engaging and educating audiences, as well as researching and conserving the collection. In consequence, a single museum can have many different internal and external professionals involved in the production and archiving of knowledge; there are many and diverse activities taking place, which involve the production of new knowledge (for instance: research, exhibitions, talks and publications); and there are many repositories for the knowledge to be archived in and distributed through (for instance: digital and physical, private and public). Vivian Van Saaze, for instance, refers to this phenomenon of fragmentation, as she experienced it during her field research in Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany: “[m]uch of the documentation was scattered over many cabinets, folders and computers in several offices.” Adding: “I now had an artwork that seemed to be everywhere in the building, fragmented into little bits and pieces in different departments, offices and minds” (Van Saaze 2013, 90).

²¹⁷ https://gulbenkian.pt/museu/en/works_cam/stitulo-336-untitled-336-152219/ [accessed 10 November 2017].

²¹⁸ In the four-month placement within CGM, I became aware of the following repositories: digital repository for internal use (In Arte) for every artwork in the collection, physical individual folders for every exhibition, physical individual folders for every artist in the collection, the physical archives that every curator holds in their offices in relation to the exhibitions they have curated, the website archive and the CGM archive within the CGF Library.

“Minds” are employed by museum professionals as a repository of knowledge also in CGM. It is revealing that Penelope Curtis remarked in an interview:

I was disappointed to discover how little information had been recorded and how many things have no files. And that the information was largely in peoples’ heads, especially in the head of the main technician who is now 55 years old, so it is clear to me that when he goes, we will lose lots of information. (Theodoraki and Curtis 2017)

I would also add that memory, as was proved in the CGM case, is not necessarily a *reliable* repository. The main technician that Curtis refers to, is the same senior installation technician who made the comment about “missing the north” relating to *Untitled #336*. In addition, when, in 2017, I discussed the particular artwork with the CGM Curator who commissioned Margarida B. Alves (six years prior, in November 2011) to write about *Untitled #336* for the CGF website, the curator (before re-visiting the text in the website and refreshing her memory) wrongly recalled that the north point of the tray was not to be facing at the geographical north. In other words, the curator could not recall the defining properties of the work correctly, without consulting the written documentation. And this is why documentation is a central responsibility for museums. As Vivian Van Saaze has remarked:

An artwork’s visual and written documentation as a form of materialised memory is considered invaluable to its perpetuation. This is the case for traditional art objects, but even more so for complex, variable, contemporary artworks such as installations, conceptual art, and performance-based artworks, which fully rely on documentation for their future existence. (Van Saaze 2015, 56)

After my research on *Untitled #336* and one week before the opening of the exhibition, I informed one of the curators of the exhibition about the references I found in relation to the artwork’s installation specifications and I provided her with the relevant texts. I emphasised that the information is also part of the CGF website and, if the installation were to remain as it was at the time of our discussion, there would be a disparity between how the work is described in the CGF website and how it is instantiated in the environment of the Museum. The curator read through the references and commented that the authors of the texts “do not mention their sources, for instance they do not write ‘the artist said’”. She added that that she will discuss the

texts with the other curators and that they will decide together. Since I had not been given an official role in the installation of the particular artwork, I didn't feel entitled to continue the discussion or to raise the issue again in follow-up discussions. The installation of *Untitled #336* remained unchanged and, furthermore, none of the texts I provided were added retrospectively in *In Arte*.

In order to understand better the CGM practices of documentation, I discussed them with Penelope Curtis. It is important to note here that, at the time my placement began, Curtis had been the director of CGM for just 15 months. In other words, what she describes below is how she found the situation in the museum:

PC: The whole collection here is too much like a kind of family entities, based on family knowledge. It is not like an official collection and we need to try and change this. I come from the Tate Collection where normally there will be someone from the Conservation Department with all the files, very often interviews with the artists and information, to make sure we were doing everything that the artist had specified. In here, there was nothing at all.

MT: Who is responsible in the CGM to archive all this information?

PC: I think that, I always assumed that, the registrar would do that, now, I see more clearly that the registrar didn't have time to collect that kind of documentation. And because works have never, even, been bought through an official process, there was no file at the time of the work's acquisition. Almost all the collection was either acquired by chance, or through an individual contact with the director, and there was no documentation about the acquisition. Not even why we should buy this work, how we can use it, who the artist is, why the work is important. Nothing at all. We have now changed that, now I have set up an acquisitions' committee, we have paperwork and we have documentation about the work itself. But now we need to fill in that gap after the acquisition of how the work should be properly shown.

MT: Were the curators (who are in charge of the Modern Collection) performing documentation for the artworks in their care?

PC: I would say that they did it on an ad-hoc basis, depending on if they were interested, but they didn't even record it. So, they would maybe know the artist, they would know the first time the work had been shown, they would remember, more or less, how it had been shown. But there was nothing recorded.

MT: In other words, it was not happening systematically and with real documentation in place.

PC: Yes, which is a combination of a lack of system and then a lack of the right people, I think.

MT: In the case of *Untitled #336*, I researched the work and even in the Gulbenkian website there is the information that the “north” neon sign needs to face north, which is not how the work is installed in the exhibition now. So, in the website, there is some information that is not used for the installation.

PC: I think we started doing that and then we had this additional problem of the design, the exhibition design and the plinths. Because the plinths were all regular and I think it would have looked wrong if one plinth was not regular and had been turned diagonally. Then we either had to change the plinth or change the artwork.

MT: Or have the artwork not being parallel to the plinth.

PC: Yes, and that is how we started. In that case, it is a compromise, isn't it? I personally, I didn't mind the artwork being on an angle. But it seemed to be more people that thought it looked wrong.

MT: That is a good moment to discuss about shared decision-making. You seem to be very open in working in dialogue with others.

PC: But also, in this case, it seemed I was working with curators who knew the artworks much better than I did. So, I could give an opinion on what looked good, but not about what was *right*. But I really thought they were... it is a feeling of... things acquiring a new meaning (isn't it?) at each point. But I think it is a little bit too loose here. I think we need to have some fixed points. (Theodoraki and Curtis 2017)

In the environment that is described above, the museum's responsibility of an artwork's documentation is evidently not a priority and this cannot but influence the attention and importance given to existent documentation materials. This perhaps explains why the Brito and Alves texts were never incorporated into *In Arte*.

At this point, I would like to draw a summary of the above, which, in fact, reflects my overall impression of the way CGM dealt with the perpetuation of contemporary artworks in their collection. In the particular case, although the Museum had access to information about the defining properties of the artwork, no one from the Team looked for this information in order to use it for the purpose of the installation: they, instead, chose to rely on memory. From

this fact, it can be inferred that the significance of this information was trivialised and undervalued. In other words, it can be assumed that the Team was not aware that in their decisions it was the authenticity of the artwork that was at stake. We can also observe that decisions about the work's instantiation were based on the curator's aesthetic judgment and not on what constitutes a property of the artwork; relatedly, the overall design of the exhibition seemed to be a bigger priority than the artist's sanction for his work. Further, we can observe that there was no established protocol, either for documenting decision-making or for tracing the artwork's biography in the museum's archive. More generally, it is clear that there was no professional directly responsible for the creation and use of documentation. On the whole, it can be concluded that in CGM the significance of documentation seemed to be underestimated and documentation was not approached as a priority. Through the case discussed next, I will examine the attitudes of an artist regarding the documentation of his artwork and the expectations he has from the collecting institution.

III. The case of *TV's Back* (1995) by Alexandre Estrela

A well-lighted room; a TV monitor on the floor right on the centre; cables and a DVD player casually present and setting the work in motion; the static footage of a TV's back shot in well-lit conditions is transmitted on the monitor's screen; walking around the monitor, the TV's back, closing a circle of a dead-end self-representation. A cancelled potentiality of engaging with something that is *other*, technology acting out its autism. The object: self-contained and mute, operating and not. The visitor: moving, yet found static in her/his quest for spectacle. The work: a TBM piece, a sculpture²¹⁹, a proposition that can be variably re-materialised again and again, a space that is, and a space to be, created.

TV's Back can be, also, described as an artwork where a TV monitor is displaying a video of the back of the same TV monitor.²²⁰ And, technically, it can be seen as a work that is composed of a TV and a piece of video footage. In this respect, *TV's Back* may seem simple for a museum to manage and mediate. But is it? During the installation process of the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3*, I observed the team trying out options: the monitor placed on a plinth and being moved from place to place inside the exhibition space. Positioned with its back close to the wall —no circulation around it permitted— and positioned in the middle

²¹⁹ Although, *TV's Back* falls technically in the category of TBM, it is important to note that Estrela defined the work as a sculpture in an interview conducted in June 2017.

²²⁰ See: Image 3 (page 137).

of the room — where the actual back of the monitor is available to be visually scrutinised by the audience. I observed the curators experimenting with different placements before making their final decision.²²¹ At that point, I hadn't yet researched the work, or even encountered it before.²²² However, I considered the decision to allow or not the audience to have access to the actual monitor's back as a major decision that would determine the potential meanings of the piece. I wondered whether the artist intended to leave such an essential decision open to the curators.

As in the case of *Untitled #336*, the information available about *TV's Back* in In Arte was very limited: list of components, one photograph of the piece, titles and dates of exhibitions and information about the date and cost of acquisition. CGM acquired the work in 2001, receiving a TV monitor and a video file. The artist provided nothing else and no further information about the artwork was kept on file. I decided to interview Alexandre Estrella, so as to trace his intent and understand what constitutes *TV's Back*.

TV's Back had been installed twice before it was acquired for the CGM collection, and three times after the acquisition. Already it had been installed in various ways: within a darkened, but also a well-lighted room; in a confined, and not, space; without, and on, a plinth; with cables and DVD player present, or carefully hidden from sight. In the interview, Estrella specified both the essential and the preferred conditions for the installation of *TV's Back*. Estrella specified that there needs to be plenty of open space around the object that allows the audience to circulate freely. The exhibition room needs to be well lit, in a way that the lighting conditions of the exhibition room match the lighting conditions of the footage. The monitor ideally, but not necessarily, is to be positioned on the floor. If a plinth is used, the plinth has to be similar to the size of the monitor. Cables and DVD player preferably are not hidden from sight. A long cable can be used to separate the monitor from the DVD player. If a plinth is used, also the DVD player can be placed inside the plinth.

The artwork, based on its material components alone, seems simple to install. In addition, after the set-up of an exhibition, when the artist met the curators in the opening, he did not give feedback on how the artwork was instantiated. The curators always worked with good intentions, utilising the materials that they had in their disposal. However, according to Estrella, there were cases where the artwork was compromised by the ways it was instantiated. In particular, Estrella remarked that when *TV's Back* was displayed in a darkened room, in a

²²¹ See: Image 4 (page 137).

²²² As with *Untitled #336*, the CGM Curatorial Team did not consider *TV's Back* as an artwork challenging to install and I wasn't involved in its installation process in any way.

confined space, on a plinth and with cables and DVD hidden from sight, the work was presented “way under its potentiality” (Theodoraki and Estrela 2017).

Although Estrela, in our interview, was very specific when describing the details of his artwork, he never took sufficient measures to officially sanction its features, not even when he sold the work to the Modern Collection. During the interview, Estrela claimed that he never had a communication with CGM about how the work needs to be installed. He acknowledged: “I always thought it was very simple to install, I think it’s my fault” (ibid.). However, he, also, remarked:

[T]his has to happen both ways, from the museum and the artist. I should have provided information, of course, but they also have to ask me for more information on how to install it. [...] I was expecting that a discussion would happen and that we would crystallise in a document (or in another form) how to install the piece from that point on. (ibid.)

In 2006, Pip Laurenson had remarked that: “[t]he problem with TBM works of art is that many aspects of their installation are under-determined and are left to the artist, installation crew, conservator and curator to determine as part of the process of realising a new installation of the work” (Laurenson 2006, 6). More than a decade later, the problem seems to persist. And the consequences seem to be more serious when the artist is not even present in the installation process: the artist’s intent remains unknown and the instantiation can completely fail the artwork. Artists, in most cases, are personally involved only in the initial instantiations of their artworks, which usually take place outside the structures of collecting institutions. Afterwards, when an artwork has become part of a collection, the artist’s direct involvement with installation processes happens rarely, and only in special occasions: when this involvement is determined as unavoidable due to the complexity of the work and when the artist’s availability permits it.²²³ Relying on the artist’s involvement for each instantiation is not a realistic solution; moreover, it can create additional problems — some of them explored earlier in this thesis: for instance, the artist wanting to adjust the artwork to his or her most recent artistic preoccupations.

²²³ In the case of Estrela, the artist commented that if he would be invited by CGM, he would be “more than happy to be involved in the installation process” adding “it is a very small community, it would have been very easy to contact me” (Theodoraki and Estrela 2017).

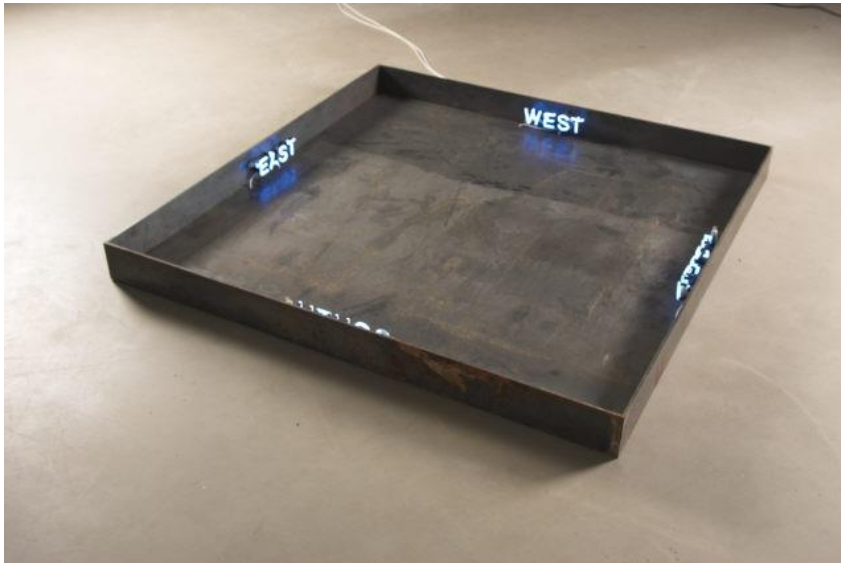
It is important to note that documenting artist's intent is not solely about installation requirements. For instance, in my discussion with Alexandre Estrela with regard to *TV's Back*, we did cover issues related to protocols of display, however, we also had to address issues of maintenance and to examine the status of the material components of the artwork. In particular, I asked Estrela to define what the solution should be in the event of the monitor breaking down. After long, loud thinking, the artist concluded that CGM needs to buy (in advance of a potential break down) a replacement monitor and be ready to capture new footage as a substitute of the original one. He also commented that he would like to determine the type of monitor, since the aesthetics of it are of importance to him. Without this information, it seems that the future of the work is jeopardised.

Since there are artworks for which, without documentation, there are no ways to establish their defining properties with clarity, one could argue that, without documentation, these artworks remain incomplete. Documenting their work can thus be thought as the responsibility of the artist. However, as we see in the case of Estrela, artists, being very close to the artwork, can regard its defining properties as self-evident; and as they haven't been trained to provide relevant information to collecting institutions, they do so very rarely.

A summary

Collecting institutions seem to be accustomed in managing artworks as self-contained entities: contemporary art has challenged this status and collecting institutions need to adjust their practices to fulfil their role as guardians. The role of a collecting institution does not end when it acquires the material elements associated with an artwork: collecting a contemporary artwork entails collecting also the information that will safeguard the perpetuation of the work as the unique work it is. In this Chapter, I presented what can happen in a museum when there is no one directly in charge of documentation. As it could be observed, the fact that a museum has a Conservation and a Curatorial Team does not guarantee that there are appropriate documentation methodologies in place, which would protect the artist's intent — and, thus, the artwork's authenticity. In the following (and final) Chapter of this thesis, I will explore a way in which collecting institutions can move forward in confronting the challenges that contemporary artworks pose with regard to their perpetuation.

Image 1



Images copyright: Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal.

Artwork featured: *Untitled #336*, 2002

by Fernando Calhau (1948–2002).

Image 2



Photo-documentation of *Untitled #336*, 2002, by Fernando Calhau at the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3*, photograph taken by MT on 02/03/2017.

Image 3



Images copyright: Unknown.

Found at: <http://homelessmonalisa.com/obra/tvs-back-alexandre-estrela-1995/>
[accessed 11 December 2017].

Image source:

<http://homelessmonalisa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/image001.jpg>

[accessed 11 December 2017].

Artwork featured: *TV's Back*, 1995, by Alexandre Estrela

Image 4

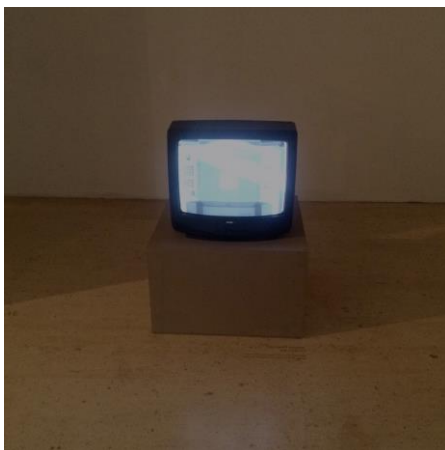


Photo-documentation of *TV's Back*, 1995, by Alexandre Estrela at the exhibition *Portugal em Flagrante, Operação 3*, photograph taken by MT on 02/03/2017.

Chapter V.

Towards a solution: sketching the ideal role

As presented in Chapters I and II of this thesis, conservation literature often discusses the challenge that museums face with contemporary art as largely a challenge of documentation. There is a plethora of academic research which analyses and proposes different documentation strategies and methods.²²⁴ The role of the artist in the documentation of her/his work has been analysed at length,²²⁵ a variety of documentation templates for the registration of information have been developed,²²⁶ and the appropriateness of the existing Collection Management Systems (CMS) has been under review.²²⁷ Furthermore, scholars have been advocating for advance documentation methodologies which take into consideration the role of subjectivity in institutional practices.²²⁸ With regard to institutional structures, scholars are emphasising the significance of good interdepartmental collaboration within museums, and often identify the conservator as the museum professional with the responsibility to play a key part in the documentation process, adjusting her/his role accordingly.²²⁹ However, it needs to be addressed that, while contemporary art documentation has been researched extensively over the last 20 years, effective documentation remains a challenge for institutional practice. The aim of this Chapter is to (a) discuss what the previous chapters reveal as the obstacles to an artwork's effective documentation; and, (b) propose a way to address these obstacles such that the perpetuation of contemporary artworks becomes less of a challenge.

In §I, I argue that a contemporary artwork requires for its perpetuation a new type of research on its identity and ontology that must be combined with continual monitoring and updating of the artwork's archive. I continue by exploring the challenges of trying to add the responsibility of such research to the regular museum roles of conservator and curator. In §II, I propose to rethink the museum structure, taking into consideration the demanding responsibility of researching and documenting the contemporary artwork's identity and

²²⁴ See: Norris 1999; Hummelen and Scholte 2004; Laurenson 2005; Heydenreich 2011; Beerkens et al. 2012; Matos et al. 2015.

²²⁵ See: Hummelen and Sillé 2005, 391-399; Huys 2011; Sommermeyer 2011.

²²⁶ See: The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement developed in 1971 by curator Seth Siegelaub and lawyer Bob Projansky; the Model for Data Registration and the Model for Condition Registration developed in 1999 by the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art, Amsterdam, Netherlands; and, the Guggenheim museum's Iteration Report and Media Reports, developed as part of the Variable Media Initiative.

²²⁷ See: Ippolito 2008; Heydenreich 2011.

²²⁸ See: GCI 2009; Van de Vall 2015a; and, Stigter 2015.

²²⁹ See: Norris 1999; Hummelen and Scholte 2004; GCI 2009.

ontology; and, I present the benefits in creating a designated role, with research and documentation as its primary responsibility. In §III, I close the Chapter by discussing the proposed role of Research and Documentation Specialist outlining its responsibilities.

I. Repositioning the challenge

Contemporary artworks require a new type of research for their perpetuation

While I acknowledge the valuable research conducted on the subject of documentation, a key point is understated: behind the challenge of the effective documentation of contemporary artworks lies a critical problem regarding the *type* of the research required to perpetuate those works.

As becomes clear when considering the theoretical debates explored in Chapter I, contemporary artwork's perpetuation demands complex, laborious and ongoing research on the artwork's identity and ontology. Contemporary artworks —being often context and site specific, manifesting variability in their instantiations and spatial configurations, using often ephemeral material and technologies that become obsolete— in addition to posing challenges in terms of their material and technological constitution (and re-constitution), they also pose challenges with regard to managing their identity and their ontology. Currently, this problem is only hinted at in the documentation discourse and I want to argue that, in order to have a chance of solving the challenge of perpetuating contemporary artworks, it is of vital importance to bring this problem to the fore and to seek to confront it directly.

As explored in Chapter I, with regard to a contemporary artwork, what is constitutive of its identity is not self-evident. A contemporary artwork's different instantiations can vary significantly, and, although varied, each instantiation is presented to audiences as the same artwork. For every instantiation, decisions are made which make claims about the artwork's contingent and constitutive properties. In other words, each instantiation constitutes a statement regarding the artwork's identity. Therefore, regardless of whether we consider the artwork's identity as fluid and multiple (where change constitutes an evolution), or as concrete and singular (where change constitutes an alteration), if the work is to continue being instantiated, the artwork's identity remains a complex and never-ending area of research. Research which moves continually from the archive to the exhibition space, and from the exhibition space to the archive, and back again.

A second unique challenge of contemporary art pertains to the ontology of the artworks. Stephen Davies, explaining the importance of an artwork's ontological investigation, has noted: "we have to be able successfully to pick out particular artworks and their contents before we can go on to analyse, describe, perform, appreciate, or evaluate them" (Davies 2016, 80). For contemporary art in particular, the ontology of a work can be rather complex to decipher. This is due to contemporary artworks not sharing the same ontology between them, and, further, artworks not easily conforming to a standardised ontological categorisation. Sherri Irvin has argued that "we must consider the ontological status of each contemporary artwork individually" (Irvin 2008, 1). In this heterogenous landscape, there are, also, cases where the ontology of a single work can evolve or be altered over time.²³⁰ On this matter, Renée Van de Vall, while exploring the complex ontology of Sol LeWitt *Wall Drawings* has remarked: "[a]s soon as conservation decisions have to be made that might intervene in the physical and conceptual constitution of the work, the work's ontological 'nature' ceases to be a matter of interpretation only: its future is at stake" (Van de Vall 2015b, 2-3).

One could assume that an artist would provide all the answers in relation to their artwork's identity and ontology. However, as it has been extensively discussed in literature the situation is rarely so straightforward.²³¹ As it has been reported, artworks are most likely to enter museum collections with information that is insufficient to answer even the most basic questions for the artwork's perpetuation, and it is the museum team that has to perform the required research in order to bring this information together. The situation becomes quite complex when the artist (for various reasons) is not available to answer questions, and, even more complex, when the artist provides contradicting information.²³² In this landscape, it becomes the museum's responsibility to trace and understand a contemporary artwork's identity and ontology through continuous research and a critical evaluation of findings.

The process of this research needs to alternate between two phases: one where data are collected/generated, and another where data are analysed. In the analysis of the data, appropriate questions are formulated around *why* things were done a certain way, taking into account the artist's intent and the artwork's institutional life, and eventually leading to concluding claims on the identity and ontology of the work.

²³⁰ See, for instance, the example of *Abstract Film No.1* by VALIE EXPORT, which was transformed after 44 years, from a performance to a sculpture, as conservation scholar Glenn Wharton illustrated in detail, in his 2016 paper "Reconfiguring contemporary art in the museum."

²³¹ See: Hummelen and Sillé 2005: 272-81 and 391-9; Sommermeyer 2011.

²³² See: GCI 2009; Ex 2005, 321; Giebeler and Heydenreich 2016.

It is important to note that referring here to concluding claims, there is no intention in making reference to objective and unquestionable truths. In a 2016 public presentation by Pip Laurenson, at MoMA (NY, USA), exploring how contemporary artworks exist and evolve within a museum collection, a collector (member of the audience) posed a question in relation to the artwork *Only Good News* (1999) by artist Roman Ondak.²³³ The artwork consists of a piece of furniture (a cabinet) filled with regular news-papers and the collector brought up the problem of the news-papers fading and him having to find the right answer on how to approach their replacement over time. Laurenson answered: “one of the real problems in this area (...) is that there is no one right thing to do (...) you will need to make a decision (...) but there won’t be a clear right decision.” In other words, Laurenson declares here that there can be different arguments on how to perpetuate the work. However, Laurenson also asserts that the question cannot remain without an answer: “you will need to make a decision”, therefore, *one* approach would need to be chosen. Although different approaches may exist, any decision and any action (even non-action) will constitute an answer to the question.

What I suggest is that in order to make an informed and reasoned decision on how to perpetuate *Only Good News* (and in fact any artwork of the contemporary art paradigm) particular research is required on the artwork’s identity and ontology. Additionally, it follows that the said decision and its rationale need to be documented back into the archive, as an acknowledged fragment of the artwork’s biography, available for future scrutiny and criticism and, notably, as material to inform subsequent decision-making.

The new type of research and regular stewardship roles within museums

How can the museum ecosystem accommodate the new and challenging research requirement that contemporary artworks pose? As becomes clear in Chapters I, II and IV, conservators and curators (the main two research roles currently associated with the perpetuation of contemporary artworks) are, in many cases, challenged by the demands of this new type of research.

The conservation profession is rather diverse. Conservators can arrive to conservation studies with different research interests and from different backgrounds: humanities, hard sciences and technology. Although the profession is diverse, in most cases, conservators self-identify and are understood as primarily focused on researching an artwork’ material

²³³ See: Laurenson 2016, reference to *Only Good News* at 1:11:20.

constitution.²³⁴ Subsequently, there have been voiced concerns about how the regular conservator's role can adjust to the new demands posed by contemporary art. For instance, Vivian Van Saaze has commented: “[b]ecause some decisions go against the principles and practices which were developed for conserving traditional art forms (...) conservators sometimes express feelings of discomfort in making decisions” (Saaze 2013, 23). While, Tom Learner has noted:

Conservators, on the whole, are very good at figuring out how to do things—such as designing a cleaning system to remove a varnish or choosing an appropriate adhesive for pieces of ceramic. But with contemporary art, isn't it often much more about figuring out what we should be doing? And to answer that, other areas of the art profession have to be involved. (GCI 2009)

To respond to Learner, I would argue that (as is evidenced by examples of scholarship and practice discussed in this thesis) there are specific conservators who are perfectly capable of figuring out what the museum “should be doing” regarding a particular contemporary artwork, and may even be amongst the leading scholars building the theoretical foundations on how the artwork's identity and ontology can be traced and delineated. However, as shown by multiple accounts (discussed in Chapter II), there are also many conservators who have neither the skillset nor the mindset to successfully perform the required research.

The profession of the curator is another which is rather diverse. As explored in Chapter III, the role of the curator has a myriad of responsibilities which individual practitioners prioritise differently. In this varied landscape, much like with conservators, there are curators who are deeply engaged with issues of perpetuation and the associated required research. However, again, this doesn't seem to be the default situation, and this is also reflected in the absence of relevant discussions in the canonical curatorial discourse. Based on this discourse the curators' nominal role can be understood as one of researching and synthesising personal, social, historical, exhibitionary, and collection narratives around given artworks. This is not the same role as dissecting, investigating, and documenting the detailed constitutive properties of the individual artwork over time. When the role of the curator in researching the identity of an artwork is discussed in literature, in most cases, it is presented as a circumstantial

²³⁴ See, for instance, the definition for the conservator's role by ICOM-CC, and Domínguez Rubio 2014.

involvement for the occasion of an exhibition set-up or a conservation treatment.²³⁵ This type of involvement cannot serve the same purposes as those served by the kind of dedicated and systematic research required, which, I repeat, is involved and laborious.

Another possible implication is one of conflicting interests, and concerns the expected role of the museum's curator in privileging and highlighting (and sometimes even constructing) certain meanings in relation to an artwork, while ignoring others, in order to frame the artwork under the particular context of a given exhibition.²³⁶ This type of authorial emancipation can be beneficial for the purpose of creating an exhibition or building a museum's collection. However, it can easily be at odds with the role of a researcher who is responsible for untangling the web of details that compose an artwork's identity and ontology, while avoiding to privilege (let alone impose) particular meanings.

As becomes evident in Chapters II, III and IV, in the case of the museum roles of both conservators and curators, an artwork's identity and ontology research is not, *by default*, approached as primary responsibility for their roles.²³⁷ At the same time, I would like to observe that the responsibility to lead this complex research (on the identity and ontology of every artwork in a collection) seems to be too demanding to be combined with attending to the already challenging responsibilities of a regular conservation or curatorial position. With regard to conservators, contemporary artworks are materially and technologically challenging, in most cases requiring continual material and technological migrations. The professional, in a regular conservation position, is thus required to respond to a plethora of challenges, for instance: constantly changing new technologies, artworks incorporating unconventional and unstable materials, rapid obsolescence of chosen elements, and even requirements to co-produce artworks. While, in the case of curators, the visibility, prestige and social influence of the role comes with a breadth of pressing responsibilities—from building a signature outlook to art and the world at large, to leading their institution's public face and status through extended networking—which divert away from the specifics of a collection's stewardship. I would, thus, suggest that, in both the case of conservators and that of curators, expecting from the same individual to manage a series of diverse and important responsibilities while devoting the required attention to an artwork's identity and ontology research can be proved unrealistic and put a collection at risk.

²³⁵ See: Irvin 2006; and, Schubert 2009.

²³⁶ The authorial role of curators has been discussed in Chapter III. For key contributions on the subject, see, for instance: Altshuler 1994; Groys 2006; Bishop 2007; and, Morgan 2013, 27-8.

²³⁷ With the exception of distinct cases of selected individuals.

Case studies discussed in literature²³⁸ show that there are certain conservators and curators who have the mindset and skillset to successfully perform the required research and documentation that the perpetuation of contemporary artworks necessitates. However, as discussed in Chapter IV, the fact that a museum has a conservation and a curatorial team does not itself guarantee that the required research and documentation is implemented with the required thoroughness. Even museums that are dedicated to contemporary art and are valuable contributors to the contemporary art perpetuation discourse, express that they struggle with the research and documentation task. In an interview with Rudolf Frieling, when discussing the challenges SFMOMA²³⁹ faces with regard to contemporary artworks, Frieling referred to the importance of “tracing the variability of a work,” and he pointed to troubling issues concerning documentation: “we sometimes struggle with the archival definition of what a work is” pointing in particular to the need of “clarifying what things are and why things were done in a certain way.” Further, discussing an artwork by artist Julia Scher, Frieling mentioned:

[W]e have now an extensive archival record for *Predictive Engineering*, as a matter of fact it is so extensive that...who is ever going to read all of this? So, you also need a moment of synthesis and a kind of a summary, to say: here is really the essence of this long interview or this long record of an internal discussion.
(Theodoraki and Frieling 2018)

Frieling expresses here the struggle to extract the artwork’s identity from the plethora of available data. The question arises: is there a way to support curators and conservators in handling the complex identity and ontology of contemporary artworks so they can concentrate on their respective research?

²³⁸ See, for instance, the *MAWC* project.

²³⁹ SFMOMA is an innovative and self-reflective museum that has developed state-of-the-art structures that foster paradigmatic interdepartmental collaboration. At the same time, the members of curatorial and conservation teams have an important publishing record and sustained active presence in leading conferences and important cross-institutional research projects on the subject of perpetuation.

II. Solution organised under an ideal role

The complications of treating the research/documentation task as a shared responsibility between many agents

The contemporary artwork's research and documentation is generally discussed as a shared task between many agents. In response, I want to point out that, although it is a task that many different museum professionals can contribute to, when no single professional is positioned as directly in-charge to lead this task, many problems can arise. For instance, as in the case described in Chapter IV, when museum professionals are already charged with multiple primary responsibilities, research and documentation is performed at one's discretion and often in an improvised manner (with great reliance on memory). When research and documentation is not determined by an institution as a primary responsibility for a role, naturally, the significance of documentation becomes overlooked and the task is approached as of a secondary priority. However, as many case studies discussed in literature reveal, the research of an artwork's identity and ontology is very often a very complex and demanding task that requires full attention and extensive involvement.

The research/documentation task concerns the state of the artwork's archive as well as the institutional use of this archive. It is a task of, first, keeping the artwork's archive up to date: initially compiling the artwork's informational component and continually reporting the artwork's institutional life back to the archive. Second, it is a task of ensuring that when an artwork is instantiated and/or treated the available information is being consulted and being acknowledged.

With regard to keeping the artwork's archive up to date, when the responsibility is dispersed between different individuals, there are three problems: (a) it becomes more difficult for an institution to centralise and keep track of the information it has of an artwork; (b) information is in greater danger of being misplaced between different repositories, or to be lost; (c) it becomes more difficult to determine whether there are gaps in knowledge and whether additional research is essential before an instantiation (or treatment) is attempted.

With regard to ensuring the use of the information, when a professional has additional responsibilities to attend to, the significance of respecting the artwork's defining properties might become secondary. For instance, when setting-up an exhibition the diverse priorities of the many professionals involved can become subject to negotiations. For instance: curators would need to defend the overall "look" and/or concept of the exhibition; conservators would

need to defend the significance of preserving original materials; architects would need to defend the exhibition design; installation technicians would need to defend the technical convenience of the installation process, gallery managers would need to defend the interests of insurance companies. With no one *directly* liable to have detailed knowledge of the artwork and to defend its defining properties, it is possible (as it is evident, for instance in Chapter IV) that other interests take precedence and the identity of the artwork can become obscured.

From a shared peripheral responsibility for many agents, to a primary responsibility for a designated role in charge

As the literature review and the field-study revealed, the research and documentation that contemporary artworks require for their perpetuation is challenging museums internationally, from peripheral small-scale collections to leading museums on the subject. It challenges conservators and curators alike and hinders their work. It is true that, within the museum environment, the research and practice of conservators and curators often touch upon the artwork's identity and ontology, and the knowledge these professionals produce can be very relevant to these subjects. It is also true that the effective collaboration of the two roles can assist the smooth management and documentation of the artwork's identity and ontology. However, in their regular established museum positions, none of these roles has as its defined, primary responsibility the continual research, tracing and documentation of the artwork's identity and ontology.

I believe that in order to be able to confront the challenge that museums face regarding the perpetuation of contemporary artworks it is essential to acknowledge the magnitude of the challenge their identities and ontologies pose. My observation is that the new paradigm of art practice necessitates a new paradigm of art steward. The transgressive and idiosyncratic nature of the artworks and the way in which they embrace change require research which is systematic, thorough and never-ending. A new museum role, leading the research and documentation of contemporary artworks can serve as a valuable collaborator for conservators and curators. I will provisionally term this role as the Research and Documentation Specialist and will outline its characteristics in the next section.

III. The role of the Research and Documentation Specialist

Responsibilities involved

In the important contributions to the discourse discussed in Chapter I, key scholars present case studies, analyse challenges and propose solutions, studying these contributions jointly makes it possible to put together the range of responsibilities for an ideal role that can lead the research and documentation mission of a museum. I will discuss these responsibilities through seven points.

1

The RDS would need to be the leader in designing and managing the overall documentation strategy and infrastructure of the institution. To review and discuss different approaches with their colleagues and to find the appropriate solutions. As explored in the CGM case and has been discussed in literature, it is not enough for an institution to have collected the information about an artwork, it is crucial that the information is readily accessible. Archiving systems should be effective and user-friendly, should prevent knowledge's fragmentation and guarantee effortless input and retrieval of information by multiple parties.

2

With regard to individual artworks, a major responsibility for the RDS is to conduct primary research on the artwork's identity and ontology, so as to ensure that the collecting institution possesses the knowledge of what constitutes the collected entity (and thus the knowledge of how to safeguard it). This entails (a) review of the materials provided as (of, and for) the artwork, in order to identify the possible gaps in knowledge that can hinder its perpetuation, and (b) appropriate research in order for these gaps to be filled. Furthermore, the RDS would need to be able to provide a transparent and detailed evaluation of the significance of the various information about the artwork, in order to allow for priorities to be drawn in cases of contradiction.²⁴⁰ It is important to note, that as testified in literature, in the long life of an artwork, new circumstances often exceed expected possibilities. It thus needs to be expected that there can be circumstances where there will be no access to explicit information on what

²⁴⁰ See, for instance, the case involving the artwork *Marocco* (1972) by Krijn Giezen presented in Chapter I (page 22).

constitutes best perpetuation solution for an artwork and the artist may no longer be available for consultation. In these cases, the RDS would need to be able to identify (through a deep study of the artist's oeuvre) what constitutes essential information about the artwork, even if this has been communicated by the artist only implicitly.

3

The RDS would need to create opportunities for the artist to sanction²⁴¹ their artwork as detailly as possible. When an artist, initially, presents a work to an audience, indeed, they assert a range of its properties, however, it is not necessary that they would have formulated answers about their artwork's identity and ontology in an all-round way. When a collected artwork is young²⁴², and while the artist is still considered part of the artwork's *Kunstwollen*, it is important for collecting institutions to create opportunities for the artist to explore and sanction the boundaries of their artwork in depth. Interviews can function as sanctioning opportunities, prompting the artist to consider possible future scenarios, imagine different constraints and formulate responses and solutions. However, various testimonies found in literature have proved that it is more effective to create opportunities for the artist to explore the boundaries of their artwork *in practice*, adjusting the work to a new display, responding to *actual* new settings and new contexts.²⁴³ This will allow the institution to observe the artist's rationale when making decisions and setting priorities. In this way, the institution can trace the artwork's critical mass²⁴⁴, and identify what for the artist is ideal, what is just acceptable, and what is non-acceptable.

4

It needs to be addressed that documentation is, by no means, an end in itself. A very important function of the RDS is to ensure that the informational component of the artwork is reaching all parties involved in the artwork's perpetuation and is *acknowledged* by them. This requires the RDS participating in the whole array of museum processes that pertain to the artwork's perpetuation.²⁴⁵ The RDS would need to collaborate with the relevant teams during decision-making processes and involve them in dialogues: pose the necessary questions, expose

²⁴¹ See the concept of "sanction" (introduced by Sherri Irvin) discussed in page 27 of this thesis.

²⁴² See the concept of "young artworks" (introduced by Joanna Phillips) discussed in footnote 24, and in page 30 of this thesis.

²⁴³ See, for instance: GCI 2009, 6 and. Gordon 2014.

²⁴⁴ See the concept of "critical mass" (introduced by Rebeca Gordon) discussed in pages 28–9 of this thesis.

²⁴⁵ This (in addition to documentation) include: acquisition, installation, treatment, refabrication and, loaning.

inconsistencies and conflicts and provide the necessary evidence to argue towards solutions. In other words, the RDS would need to make teams aware of details that could be overlooked by colleagues who are not directly in charge of researching an artwork in depth. This places the RDS in a position where they would need to negotiate with others towards solutions which will *defend* the artwork's defining properties, and thus, authenticity.

5

As already explored in the previous chapters, documentation, in order to be effective, needs not be approached as just a process of collecting external information, instead it needs to be understood, also, as a reflective process in which the museum acknowledges and records its own influence in the museum life of the artworks.²⁴⁶ In other words, the RDS would need to, continually, report back in the archive the institutional process of decision-making. Renée Van de Vall, for instance, has argued for the value of including, as part of an artwork's documentation, the ethical dilemmas that may arise in the process of decision-making (Van de Vall 2015a). This attitude signifies an approach where decisions are not understood as unquestionable absolutes, instead their relativity is underlined, and the importance of providing detailed information on the thinking and negotiations that bring about the decisions is acknowledged.

6

Although the RDS is proposed here as a leader in the research and documentation mission of an institution, other museum roles (mainly conservators and curators) are, still, understood as important allies and contributors in this mission. Essential information about an artwork can appear when is least expected, therefore, it is important for the wider team to be ready to turn it into institutional knowledge to inform institutional practice. Accordingly, the RDS would have to assume the role of encouraging and overseeing the documentation practices of institutional colleagues. As an advocate for good practice, the RDS would need to continually promote the significance of documentation-as-process as well as value of documentation-as-information.

²⁴⁶ On the reflective approach on documentation see: Phillips 2015; Stigter 2015; and Van de Vall 2015.

In this final point, I would like to address the benefits in the RDS having the role of an advocate for documentation, also, when working with artists. As already discussed, the artist interview is an essential tool for concretising and establishing the artist's intent.²⁴⁷ However, an artist interview can, additionally, be a platform through which to communicate to artists the importance of effectively sanctioning their artworks, and a platform to share with them the means to do so. In this way, a more productive collaboration between the collecting institution and the artist can be achieved, and artists can become more aware of the ways in which their own documentation practice can support their artworks in maintaining an accurate presence into the future.

The profile and background appropriate for the role

A successful undertaking of the series of responsibilities outlined above requires expertise in a range of documentation methods, including: archival research, artists' interviews, interviews of collaborators and other insiders, visual documentation, and information management. Furthermore, it requires interpersonal skills and a sound knowledge of contemporary art history, technical art history and the contemporary art conservation discourse. At the same time, it requires attention to the wider principle of conservation ethics, where the implications of alternative options are systematically considered and every decision is to be thoroughly justified and documented. In addition, the professional needs to be well-informed of moral right legislations, in order to provide guidance on which modifications to the work are legally acceptable and which are not. Lastly, I want to point out that the role would require a professional who is a critical thinker, with a good understanding of relevant theories from the philosophy of art, dealing with concepts such as: authenticity, ontology of art, authorship, artistic value, and interpretation.²⁴⁸

Although the responsibilities of the role are very specific, it is understood that the background of the appropriate professional can vary and many museum and art professionals, with the necessary training, could be in position to undertake the role successfully. In fact, many texts by conservators and curators found in the literature (where they discuss their

²⁴⁷ See: Mancusi-Ungaro 1999; Sturman 1999; Petovic 1999; Hermens 1999; Peek and Brokerhof 1999; Weyer and Heydenreich 1999; Sheesley 2007; Huys 2011; and, Stigter 2015.

²⁴⁸ For relevant examples of books and essays around these concepts, see: Goodman 1976; Currie 1989; Danto 1993; Davies 2001 and 2016 [2006]; Irvin 2005a, 2005b, 2006 and 2008; Livingston 2005 and 2016; Livingston and Archer 2010; Mag Uidhir 2011 and 2013; and, Gover 2018.

approach of challenging cases) can be read as accounts of individuals performing the role of RDS, even if the role itself is not being defined.

Importance of philosophy of art for the role

To justify why the role requires a good understanding of relevant theories from the philosophy of art, I will refer back to Chapter I, where scholars like Renée Van de Vall and Jill Sterrett were shown to argue that the perpetuation of contemporary artworks can only be approached on a case-by-case basis, describing the establishment of overarching codes of ethics as an improbable task.²⁴⁹ Having no option to rely on pre-set codes of ethics, the perpetuation team needs to rely on a broader theoretical framework to inform their decision making.²⁵⁰ This framework—as with traditional codes of ethics—would need to address key concepts as the ones mentioned above. Therefore, a good understanding of the relevant philosophical theories around these concepts is a prerequisite for informed decision-making.

There is strong evidence in the literature to show the reliance on philosophy of art to tackle questions concerning the perpetuation of contemporary artworks, both from the perspective of practitioners (conservators and curators), and from philosophers themselves.²⁵¹ For example, Stephen Davies does so in his book “The Philosophy of Art” when referring to the artwork *Away from the Flock* (1994) by Damien Hirst. Davies introduces his theory on the ontology of art, and, as a way of providing an idea of its applicability, he writes:

A piece by Damien Hirst – a sheep cut in half and suspended in formaldehyde – was vandalized by having Indian ink thrown into its tank. The gallery spent a great deal of money to restore the work to its former appearance. It would have been simpler and cheaper to start again, with the carcass of another, similar sheep. Had they done so, could they represent the work as Hirst’s? Would it make a difference to how the previous question should be answered if the gallery obtained Hirst’s approval before making the replica? (Davies 2016 [2006], 103)

²⁴⁹ See page 33 of this thesis.

²⁵⁰ See, for instance page 26 of this thesis, discussing the well-known example of Pip Laurenson relying on Nelson Goodman’s ontological distinction between autographic and allographic works and on Stephen Davies’s theory on the ontology of musical performances to draw a strategy for the perpetuation of time-based media installations.

²⁵¹ See, for instance: Irvin 2005a, 2005b, 2006 and 2008; Laurenson 2006; Davies 2016 [2006], 41, 46, 64, 68, 86 and 103; Verbeeck and Broers 2016; Gover 2018, 74 and 115; and, Ammann 2019.

Davies then claims that one can rely on his theory to answer these types of questions. Like Davies, there are many philosophers who have developed theories of art that can be used as frameworks with the objective to (a) determine the impact certain perpetuation decisions can have on a particular artwork; and (b) analyse and solve perpetuation dilemmas. The RDS who is well-versed in the different relevant theories by different philosophers will be in a position to support the entire perpetuation team in deciding on an approach with the understanding of its theoretical implications.

Preliminary feedback on the idea of the role

I shared the premise of the RDS role with Glenn Wharton and I believe it can be beneficial to share his feedback given that he is a leading member in the international community which mobilises the contemporary art perpetuation discourse — a position that provides him with a valuable insight into the concerns, but also the breakthroughs, present in the field.²⁵² Wharton responded:

Contemporary art museums need to have someone on staff whose role it is to document the ongoing life of variable works in their collections. They may conduct all of the work themselves or they may oversee the work of others to make sure that it is carried out. This person should have a deep understanding of recent art history, curatorial concerns, exhibition concerns, and conservation concerns. In addition, they should have skills to perform ethnographic research within the museum including observation and participatory analysis, as well as formal and informal interviews with artists and other actors in the creation, collection, display, and conservation of contemporary art. They should be familiar with database design and management, with particular knowledge of the museum's collections

²⁵² Glenn Wharton has extensive experience in working as part of a museum's team, and being in-charge of safeguarding a collection of contemporary artworks. In particular, Wharton established the media and performance conservation program for MoMA, overseeing the documentation of 2000 artworks. Although he has a long career as a conservator, his educational background and expertise bridge many subjects relevant to the perpetuation mission (social sciences, art history, and conservation), providing him with a broad outlook on the issues at stake. At the same time, Wharton has a long academic experience starting as a doctoral researcher, having been a Professor of Museum Studies and currently being a Professor of Art History & Conservation. This experience certifies a deep knowledge of the theoretical implication of the institutional practice pertaining to the perpetuation of contemporary artworks.

management system, digital asset management system, and other information management systems within the museum.²⁵³

Wharton portrays the role as an observer, interviewer, ethnographer and archivist; with a good knowledge of contemporary art history and of the curatorial and conservation concerns at stake. He focuses on the institutional life of the artwork and the importance of institutional self-reflection, and stresses the need for a documentation that accounts for both. I share his view, but I would like to also emphasise the role's need for analytical thinking. Understanding the identity and ontology of contemporary artworks —navigating through an intricate web of information to highlight the essence (to borrow Rudolf Frieling's term²⁵⁴)— is a central function of the role. It requires a critical analysis of the ideas and facts concerning an artwork, as well as a good understanding of particular theories from the philosophy of art. I would position the RDS as an investigator and an archivist, all while employing critical reasoning to understand, communicate, and safeguard the conceptual intricacies of a contemporary artwork.

A summary

This Chapter had the objective to analyse the findings of the previous chapters in order to (a) delineate what lies behind the challenge of perpetuating contemporary artworks, and, (b) outline the premises for a solution. First, I argued that contemporary artwork's perpetuation demands a new type of ongoing research which is very complex and laborious; research on the artwork's identity and ontology, addressing both the artist's intent and the artwork's institutional life. I continued by discussing how museums are challenged by this new requirement; and, how, in most cases, it proves unrealistic to add the responsibility of this new type of research to an existent museum role. I argued that museums will benefit greatly from establishing a dedicated position for a professional to devote full attention to this new paradigm of research. This new role can produce knowledge that can act as a bridge between the artwork and the collecting institution, a bridge between artwork's past, present and future and a bridge between all the artwork's stakeholders. An analysis of the role's responsibilities and an outline of the profile of the professional appropriate for the role, closed the Chapter.

²⁵³ From an email sent by Glenn Wharton to Maria Theodoraki in April 2019. Permission to publicly share is granted by Wharton.

²⁵⁴ See page 145 of this thesis.

Thesis Summary

This doctoral thesis aims to analyse and clarify the responsibilities and roles of contemporary art stewards within the context of a museum. Through research on the current collection care practices of museum conservators and curators with regard to contemporary art, with a special focus on the production, use and management of documentation, the thesis seeks to investigate whether and how new methodologies developed in the relevant theoretical discourse are applied in practice. The study brings to light the challenges that the traditional museum structure faces in the process of perpetuating contemporary artworks, and proposes a solution designed to accommodate an effective implementation of the new theoretical frameworks and methodologies developed in the discourse.

This thesis contributes to current knowledge by:

- Performing an extended analysis of the discourse on the artist's intent, and defending a distinction between an artist's meaning-intent and an artist's intent in relation to the work's identity as theorised by philosopher Stephen Davies.
- Drawing an overview and analysis of the shared underlying ideas in the discourse's prevailing theoretical frameworks, and outlining the position that the aim of perpetuation practices is to unearth and safeguard an artwork's core identity, as it has been sanctioned by the artist. In addition, the thesis contributes to the current knowledge by presenting and facing the challenges that have been mounted against this position in the existing scholarship.
- Bringing to light the details of the collaboration between conservators and curators during processes of contemporary art perpetuation.
- Delineating the range of responsibilities entailed in the mission of perpetuating²⁵⁵ contemporary artworks and defining a new museum role dedicated in understanding

²⁵⁵ The term "perpetuation" refers to a holistic preservation of the integral components (material and/or immaterial) of an artwork over time.

and documenting the identity and ontology of a contemporary artwork, tracing the artist's intent, as well as the rationale of institutional decision-making.

The thesis **Introduction** introduces the aim of the thesis which is: first, to examine the challenge that conservators and curators face in the process of perpetuating contemporary artworks; and, second, to delineate the range of responsibilities entailed in this complex mission, in order to design a solution. Sketching the context of the thesis, a brief overview of the contemporary art perpetuation discourse is presented, starting from the 1977 *Restoration of Modern Art Symposium* in Dusseldorf and leading to the EU funded NACCA project that this thesis is part of. The thesis proceeds with a clarification of the use of key terms: (a) the term "conservation" referring only to the particular role and practice of professional conservators, while the term "perpetuation" referring to the wider aim of "conservation as broadly defined"; (b) the terms "conservator" and "curator" being used following the English paradigm; (c) the term "contemporary art" being used not as a chronological categorisation but as a term signifying a particular paradigm of art which is distinct from both traditional and modern art. The defining characteristics of this paradigm are then determined as being: the transgression of established norms, idiosyncrasy, and an embrace of change. Focusing on the subject of change, the thesis explores the concept of "unfolding artworks", and underlines the distinction between change utilised by artists as a creative component, and change that is non-inherent to the artwork — emphasising that not all changes can be approached as requiring the same type of management. The Introduction closes with a presentation of the research questions and a discussion of the methodology used in order to answer them.

Chapter I explores the prevailing theoretical perspectives on what constitutes ethical and effective museum practices for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks, and highlights what it recognises as the main principles appropriate to guide contemporary art stewardship. Looking into the early discourse, it examines the shift of focus for perpetuation practices from an object's state to the artwork's identity — a shift from change having to be prevented or concealed, to change having to be managed. With a decision to follow the developments in the discourse under the lens of the concept of "artist's intent", the thesis proceeds to clarify issues of terminology concerning the term and defends a clear distinction between meaning-intent vs. intent about the work's constitutive properties. It then provides a critical analysis of the ways in which conservation scholars have been addressing artist's intent from the *Cleaning Controversy* of 1947–1963 to the present day, exploring the relevant recent concepts of "artist's

sanction”, “critical mass”, and “young artworks”. By drawing an overview of the shared underlying ideas in the prevailing theoretical frameworks, a premise is outlined: that the aim of perpetuation practices is to unearth and safeguard an artwork’s core identity, as it has been sanctioned by the artist. The thesis proceeds to explore two challenges that have been mounted against this premise: (a) an invitation to embrace “alterity” in the work, rather than aiming towards a legitimate instance of an artwork, and (b) a proposition to approach and manage the contemporary artwork as being collectively authored by the artist and the museum. Through a critical analysis of the theoretical and ethical implications of these proposals, a response is mounted, stressing: (a) the distinction between the artwork and its instance; (b) the indispensable link between the responsibility of artwork’s preservation and the requirement of establishing boundaries between what can change and what cannot in the artwork; (c) the institutionally and theoretically verified distinct authority of an artist over their work; and (d) the risks of canonising practices of institutional assimilation.

Having defended what this thesis considers as the main principles for an ethical and effective perpetuation practice for contemporary artworks, the theoretical ground is set on which the roles of conservators and curators, as well as the ways in which they have been responding to this different art paradigm, could be examined.

Chapter II is dedicated to the conservation profession. It begins with a brief historical overview of the field, up to the emergence of contemporary art, and explores the ways in which this emergence challenged the traditional conservation paradigm, demanding a total reconceptualization of the aims and practices of conservation. Although the Chapter focuses its examination on conservators’ response to time-based media works, the thesis defends that the challenge in contemporary art perpetuation concerns the characteristic of variability, which is intrinsic to all contemporary artworks. The discussion of variability leads back to the significance of the artist’s intent and, how it dictates processes of thorough documentation. The chapter then examines the reported institutional uneasiness when documentation is positioned as being a clear responsibility of conservators, raising a wider question around the identity of the profession. An identity, which was marked as fragmented based on conservators’ testimonies revealing a lack of consensus on the jurisdiction of their role, as well as a lack of consensus on the overall purpose of the profession. Examining the literature further, an ongoing shift in the role of the conservator is outlined: a rise of subjectivity; conservators’ outreach; and, a turn of attention from the artwork’s material to the artwork’s identity. Lastly, the thesis

examines the state of conservation training and voiced concerns regarding the suitability of standard training to the requirements of effective contemporary art stewardship.

Chapter III is focused on the role of the curator. It highlights how the role has been evolving, mainly through the distinctive practice of individual practitioners, and provides a brief historical overview from the role of the “keeper”, to the rise of the “independent curator”, and finally to the subject of this investigation: the contemporary art curator. Particular attention is given to the 1990s, where curatorial studies were established, and a separation between the roles of the curator and art historian were made. The curator’s role in the contemporary art museum is described as having multiple and diverse responsibilities, and being a very powerful position within the structure of the museum, as well as within the artworld as a whole. Looking into curators’ stance towards contemporary art perpetuation, the thesis notes their openness to improvisation, and their often lax attitude towards documentation. Turning the investigation towards the interaction between roles, the thesis explores how —despite the shifts in the conservation profession discussed in Chapter II— in most cases, conservators are either perceived by curators as being preoccupied and entrusted solely with technical and safety issues and, or, while being appreciated for their contribution, they remain subject to hierarchical structures. The curators’ authoritative position inside museums is discussed as extending to decision-making, with curators having the final word in conservation and installation processes — even in cases where curators are not the ones performing the research on the artwork’s defining properties. The Chapter closes with an exploration of curatorial training, pointing out that training institutions seem to neither address nor train contemporary art curators as stewards of artworks, confirming that collection care is not one of the role’s main priorities.

Chapter IV presents the observations from the four-month field research conducted at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum (CGM) in Lisbon, Portugal. The research focused on the installation of two artworks: *Untitled #336* (2002) by Fernando Calhau and *TV’s Back* (1995) by Alexandre Estrela. The thesis describes how one of the works was installed in a way that did not meet with the work’s documented defining properties, and discusses the significance of such a discrepancy in the light of perpetuation discourse — underlining the important (and, at times, problematic²⁵⁶) role of exhibitions as authorised and documented claims of what constitutes the artwork. The Chapter looks into the ways in which the different CGM

²⁵⁶ When the work is re-enacted in ways that compromise its authenticity.

professional roles contributed to, and collaborated in, the process of re-enacting the contemporary artworks within the exhibition space. It describes an environment where curators (with the support of the exhibition's architect and the senior installation technicians) make all the installation decisions that pertain to the artwork's identity, while the involvement of the conservation team is reduced to cleaning and restoring surfaces, supervising the handling of fragile pieces, and creating props to secure artworks on frames and platforms. With regard to documentation, the Chapter reflects on the problem of knowledge fragmentation that exists in CGM due to the presence of multiple depositories, and no individual being directly responsible for creating and managing the artwork's documentation. Most importantly, it describes that in CGM there is no established protocol, neither for documenting a contemporary artwork when it enters the collection, nor for documenting institutional decision-making and the institutional life of the work. The problem is intensified when artists provide the collecting institution with insufficient information, viewing their artworks' defining properties as self-evident. The Chapter closes by stressing that insufficient documentation can result in compromising the contemporary artwork's authenticity, and highlighting (as the field research demonstrated) that when documentation is not set as an essential responsibility for a role, it can be easily neglected.

The final chapter, **Chapter V**, ties together the research outlined in all previous chapters, in order to pinpoint the particular challenge contemporary artworks pose with regard to their perpetuation. In that context, it is claimed that effective documentation involves a new type of complex research that concerns the artwork's identity and ontology: addressing the artist's intent and tracing institutional decision-making. The way in which contemporary artworks embrace change, necessitates institutional research which is systematic, thorough and continual. An analysis is drawn on why the regular museum roles of conservators and curators seem to be challenged by this new responsibility. Reasons range from not having the appropriate mindset and/or skillset, to being already overwhelmed with their regular responsibilities. The thesis argues that museums need to acknowledge the magnitude of the challenge at stake, and create a dedicated position for which this new type of research will be its *regular responsibility*. This ideal museum role for the research and documentation of contemporary artworks is defined as having seven main responsibilities: leading the design and management of the overall documentation and archiving strategy and infrastructure of the institution; conducting primary research on the artwork's identity and ontology (and when possible performing artist interviews); creating opportunities for the artist to sanction their artwork; ensuring that the informational component of the artwork is reaching all parties

involved in the artwork's perpetuation and is *acknowledged* by them; being reflective and reporting the institutional process of decision-making back to the archive; encouraging and overseeing the documentation practices of institutional colleagues; and communicating to artists the importance of effectively documenting their artworks. In summary, the thesis describes the role as being an investigator/archivist, who employs critical reasoning to understand, communicate, and safeguard the contemporary artwork's conceptual intricacies. The appropriate professionals to undertake the role can come from different backgrounds, including conservation and curation, and require relevant training.

Reference List

AAMC. 2007. "Professional Practices for Art Museum Curators." Available at: http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.artcurators.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/aamc_professional_standards.pdf [Accessed 2 March 2018].

Albano, A. 1996 [1988]. "Art in transition." In *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, edited by Stanley Price, N., Kirby Talley M. Jr. and Melucco Vaccaro, A.M., 176–184. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.

Allen, R. ed. 2004. *The Penguin Dictionary*. London: Penguin Books.

Altshuler, B. 1994. *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*. New York: Abrams.

Ammann, K. 2019. "Framing Intention. Presentation as Preservation Strategy in Video Art." In: *The Explicit Material*, edited by Hölling, H., Bewer F. G. and Ammann, K., 142–166. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Australia ICOMOS. 2013a. *Burra Charter, Australia Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Interest*. Burra: Australia ICOMOS Incorporated. Available at: <https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf> [Accessed 10 March 2021].

Australia ICOMOS. 2013b. *Practice Note. Understanding and assessing cultural significance*. Burra: Australia ICOMOS Incorporated. Available at: https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/Practice-Note_Understanding-and-assessing-cultural-significance.pdf [Accessed 10 March 2021].

Avrami, E., Mason R. and de la Torre M. eds. 2000. *Values and Heritage Conservation: Research Report*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute. Available at: www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/valuesrpt.pdf. [Accessed 10 April 2017].

Bacharach, S. and Tollefsen, D. 2010. "We Did It: From Mere Contributors to Coauthors." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 68, N. 1: 23–32.

Barok, D., Noordegraaf, J. and De Vries, A.P. 2019. "From Collection Management to Content Management in Art Documentation: The Conservator as an Editor." *Studies in Conservation*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2019.1603921> [Accessed 25 August 2019].

Barros Oliveira, C. and Macedo, R. 2009. "When Materiality is Transitory. The Preservation of *Árvore Jogo/Lúdico* by A. Carneiro." *IV GEIIC Congress: La restauración en el siglo XXI. Función, estética e imagen, Cáceres, 25, 26 e 27 de Novembro*. GEIIC (IIC Group Spain).

Basilio, M., Briggs, S. and Roger G. 2008. "Impermanence and Entropy: Collaborative Efforts Installing Contemporary Art." *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 47:1.3–13.

Baumgart, U. 2011. "Visualization and Documentation of Installation Art." In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice of Installation Art.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Glenn W., 173–184. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Becker, H. 2008. *Art Worlds*. 25th Anniversary edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Beerkens, L., Hummelen, IJ., 't Hoen, P., Saaze, V. van, Scholte, T., and Stigter, S. 2012. *The Artist Interview. For conservation and presentation of contemporary art. Guidelines and practice*. Heyningen: Jap Sam Books.

Bek, R. 2011. "Between Ephemeral and Material – Documentation and Preservation of Technology-Based Works of Art." In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice of Installation Art.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Glenn W., 205–215. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Birnbaum, D. 2005. "When attitude becomes form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann." *Artforum International*, 22 June 2005. [pp: 55, 58, 346, 355].

Bishop, C. 2007. "What Is a Curator?" Available at: <http://idea.ro/revista/?q=en/node/41&articol=468> [Accessed 2 March 2018].

Bisschoff, M. 2015 [1999]. "Thaw on Nova Zemlya." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 107–111. London: Archetype Publications.

Brandi, C. 1996 [1949]. "The Cleaning of Pictures in Relation to Patina, Varnish and Glazes." In *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, edited by Stanley Price, N., Kirby Talley M. Jr. and Melucco Vaccaro, A., 380–393. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.

Brenson, M. 1998. "The Curator's Moment." *Art Journal* Vol. 57, No. 4, 16–27.

Brito M.L. 2013. "Fernando Calhau: o espaço, o tempo e a noite." Available at: repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/17703/2/ULFBA_TES667.pdf [Accessed 10 November 2017].

Brokerhof, A.W., Scholte, T., Ankersmit, B., Wijers, G. and Vermaat, S. 2011. "Installation Art Subjected to Risk Assessment – Jeffrey Shaw's *Revolution* as Case Study" In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Wharton, G., 91–101. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Brown, J. and Learner, T. 2010. "Training Needs for the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art - Interim meeting report." E&T and MMCA working groups of ICOM-CC Available at: www.icom-cc.org/54/document/training-needs-for-the-conservation-of-modern-and-contemporary-art--interim-meeting-report/?id=960 [Accessed 1 March 2021].

- Buden, B. 2012. "Towards the Heterosphere: Curator as Translator." In *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, edited by Lind, M. and Konsthall, T., 23–44. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Bunzl, M. 2014. *In Search of a Lost Avant-garde: An Anthropologist Investigates the Contemporary Art Museum*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Buskirk, M. 2003. *Contingent object of contemporary art*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Butler, C.H. and Schwartz, A. eds. 2010. *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.
- CAC and CAPC. 2000. *Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice*. Available at: www.cac-accr.ca/files/pdf/ecode.pdf [Accessed 10 November 2019].
- Cangia, F. 2013. "The interview as an Instrument." In *Ephemeral Monuments: History and Conservation of Installation Art*, edited by Pugliese, M. and Ferriani, B., 162–168. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.
- Caple, C. 2010. "Conservation: concept and reality." In *The conservation of archaeological materials: current trends and future directions*, 1–10. Oxford: Archaeopress, BAR International Series. (2116).
- Castriota, Brian. 2019. "Authenticity, Identity, and Essentialism: Reframing Conservation Practice." In *What Is the Essence of Conservation? Papers from the ICOM-CC and ICOFOM Session at the 25th General Conference Held in Kyoto, 4 September 2019*, edited by Mairesse, F. and Peters, R.F., 39–48. Paris: ICOFOM.
- CGM. 2017. *Calouste Gulbenkian Museum – Guide*. Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Chiantore, O. and Rava, A. 2013. *Conserving Contemporary Art: Issues, Methods, Materials, and Research*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications.
- Clavir, M. 1998. "The Social and Historic Construction of Professional Values in Conservation." *Studies in Conservation*, 43 (1): 1–8.
- Clavir, M. 2002. *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations*. Columbia: University of British Columbia Press.
- Clavir, M. 2009. "Conservation and Cultural Significance." In *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, edited by Richmond A. and Bracker, A.L. 139–149. Burlington: Butterworth–Heinemann.
- Coddington, B. 1999. "The Case against Amnesia." In *Mortality/Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art*, edited by Corzo, M., 19–24. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.

Corzo, M. ed. 1999. *Mortality/Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art*. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.

Cotte, S., Tse, N., and Inglis, A. 2017. "Artists' interviews and their use in conservation: reflections on issues and practices." *AICCM Bulletin*, 37:2, 107–118. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10344233.2016.1251669> [Accessed: 20 March 2020].

Currie, G. 1989. *An Ontology of Art*, London: Macmillan.

Danto, A. 1993. "Responses and Replies." In *Danto and His Critics*, edited by Rollins, M., 193–216. Oxford: Blackwell.

Davies, L. and Heuman, J. 2004. "Meaning Matters: Collaborating with Contemporary Artists." In *Modern Art, New Museums: Contributions to the 2004 IIC Congress, Bilbao.*, edited by Roy, A. and Smith, P., 30–33. London: International Institute for Conservation.

Davies, S. 2001. *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davies, S. 2016 [2006]. *The Philosophy of Art*. Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell.

De La Torre, M. 2002. *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute. Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10020/gci_pubs/values_cultural_heritage [Accessed 10 February 2021].

Derieux, F. ed. 2007. *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier.

Desvallées, A. and Mairesse F. eds. 2011. *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Domínguez Rubio, F. 2014. "Preserving the unpreservable: docile and unruly objects at MoMA." In *Theory and Society*, 43(6): 617–645.

Dykstra, S. 1996. The Artist's Intentions and the Intentional Fallacy in Fine Arts Conservation. *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 35(3), 197–218.

E.C.C.O. 2003. *Professional Guidelines (II) Code of Ethics*. Available at: www.ecco-eu.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ECCO_professional_guidelines_II.pdf [Accessed 10 May 2020].

Edson, G. and Dean, D. 1994. *The Handbook for Museums*. London: Routledge.

Eleey, P. 2013. "What About Responsibility?" In *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating.*, edited by Hoffmann, J., 113–9. Milan: Mousse Publishing.

Engel, D., Hinkson, L., Phillips, J. and Thain, M. 2018. "Reconstructing Brandon (1998–1999): A Cross-disciplinary Digital Humanities Study of Shu Lea Cheang's Early Web Artwork." *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2 Available at: www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/12/2/000379/000379.html [Accessed 1 March 2021].

- Finn, C. 2012. "Written Documentation for Paintings Conservation." In *Conservation of Easel Paintings*, edited by Stoner J.H. and Rushfield, R., 271-276. London: Routledge.
- Fiske, T. 2009. "White Walls: Installations, Absence, Iteration and Difference." In *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, edited by Richmond A. and Bracker A., 229–240. Oxford, London: Butterworth-Heinemann, Victoria and Albert Museum.
- Fowle, K. 2007. "Who Cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today." In *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, edited by Rand, S. and Kouris, H., 10–19. New York: apexart.
- Getty Conservation Institute. 2008. "Conservation Issues of Modern and Contemporary Art (CIMCA) Meeting." Available at: www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/science/modpaints/CIMCA_meeting_jun08.pdf [Accessed 5 March 2021].
- GCI. 2009. *Competing commitments: A discussion about ethical dilemmas in the conservation of modern and contemporary art*, Newsletter 24.2 (Fall). Available at: www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/24_2/dialogue.html [Accessed 25 September 2019].
- Giebeler, J. and Heydenreich, G. 2016. "Blind spots in contemporary art conservation? Results of an interdisciplinary workshop." In *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation.*, edited by Hermens, E. and Robertson, F., 128–38. London: Archetype Publications.
- Glaser, J.R. and Zenetou, A.A. 1996. *Museums – A Place to Work. Planning Museum Careers*. London: Routledge.
- Gombrich, E. H. 1996 [1960]. "Restoration from the Perspective of the Humanities." In *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, edited by Stanley Price, N., Kirby Talley M. Jr. and Melucco. Vaccaro, A., 110–128. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.
- Goodman, N. 1976. *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Gordon, R. 2014. "Identifying and pursuing authenticity in contemporary art." In *Authenticity and Replication: The 'Real Thing' in Art and Conservation.*, edited by Gordon, R., Hermens, E. and F. Lennard, F., 95–107. London: Archetype Publications.
- Gordon, R. and Hermens E. 2013. "The Artist's Intent in Flux." *CeROArt*. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/ceroart/3527> [Accessed 25 September 2019].
- Gover, K.E. 2018. *Art and Authority*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Graham, J. and Sterrett, J. 1997. "An Institutional Approach to the Collections Care of Electronic Art." *WAAC [Western Association for Art Conservation] Newsletter*, September 1997, Vol. 19, No. 3.

Grevenstein, A. and Scharff, M. 2005 [1999]. "Introductions Texts in Training Conservators of Modern Art." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 296–299. London: Archetype Publications.

Groys, B. 2006. "Multiple Authorship." In *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Exhibitions and Biennials*, edited by Vanderlinden, B. and Filipovic, E., 93-99. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Groys, B. 2009. "Politics of Installation." *e-flux Journal* 2. Available at: www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/ [Accessed 2 March 2018].

Guldemon, J. 2015 [1999]. "Artificial Respiration." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 79–81. London: Archetype Publications.

Heinich, N. 2015. *Το Παράδειγμα της Σύγχρονης Τέχνης. Δομές μιας καλλιτεχνικής επανάστασης*. Αθήνα: Πλέθρον. [translated from: Heinich, N., 2014. *Le Paradigme de l'art contemporain. Structures d'une révolution artistique*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.]

Heinich, N. and Pollak, M. 1996. "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a singular position." In *Thinking about exhibitions*, edited by Greenberg R., Ferguson B. and Nairne S., 231–250. London: Routledge.

Hermens, E. 2005 [1999]. "Working with Artists in Order to Preserve Original Intent: Proceedings II." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 397–399. London: Archetype Publications.

Hernández Chong Cuy, S. 2013. In *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating.*, edited by Hoffmann, J., 57–69. Milan: Mousse Publishing.

Hess Norris, D. 1999. "The Survival of Contemporary Art: The Role of the Conservation Professional in this Delicate Ecosystem." In *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art*, edited by Corzo M., 131–134. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.

Heydenreich, G. 2011. "Documentation of Change – Change of Documentation." In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice of Installation Art.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Glenn W., 155–172. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Hoffmann, J. 2007. "A Certain Tendency of Curating." In *Curating Subjects*, edited by O'Neill, P., 137–142. London: Open Editions.

Hölling, H. 2015. "The Technique of Conservation. Hands and Minds, Science, and Humanities." Expanded version of paper "Conservation and Contingency: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice" presented at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin on November 22, 2015. Available at: www.hannahoelling.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Hanna-Ho%CC%88lling_The-Technique-of-Conservation_draft-October-30-1.pdf [Accessed 2 March 2021].

Hummelen, IJ. 1999. "The Conservation of Contemporary Art: New Methods and Strategies?" In *Mortality/Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art*, edited by Corzo, M. 171–174. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.

Hummelen, IJ. 2005. "Conservation strategies for modern and contemporary art. Recent Developments in the Netherlands." *Cr*, 3: 22-26. Available at: [www.inside-Installations.org/OCMT/mydocs/HUMMELEN Conservation Strategies for Modern and Contemporary Art.pdf](http://www.inside-Installations.org/OCMT/mydocs/HUMMELEN%20Conservation%20Strategies%20for%20Modern%20and%20Contemporary%20Art.pdf) [Accessed 20 March 2020].

Hummelen, IJ. and Scholte, T. 2004. "Sharing Knowledge for the Conservation of Contemporary Art: Changing Roles in a Museum without Walls?" In *Modern Art, New Museums: Contributions to the 2004 IIC Congress, Bilbao.*, edited by Roy, A. and Smith, P., 208–212. London: International Institute for Conservation.

Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D. eds. 2005 [1999]. *Modern Art: Who Cares?* London: Archetype Publications.

Huys, F. 2011. "The Artist Is Involved." In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice of Installation Art.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Glenn W., 105–118. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

ICOM. 2017. *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. Available at: http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf [Accessed 5 November 2019].

ICOM-CC. 1981. "The Conservator Restorer: A Definition of the Profession. Paris 1981." Available at: www.icom-cc.org/47/about/definition-of-profession-1984/ [Accessed 20 June 2020].

ICOM-CC. 2010. "Training needs for the conservation of modern and contemporary art." Available at: https://elp.northumbria.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/users/hcjb1/Training_Needs/media/E-Newsletter%20Main%20Template4.pdf [Accessed 11 March 2020].

ICOM-CIDOC. 2012. "Statement of principles of museum documentation. Staffing and systems." Available at: http://cidoc.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/principles6_2.pdf [Accessed 10 March 2021].

Ippolito, J. 2008. "Death by Wall Label." In *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, edited by Paul, C., 106–130. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Irvin, S. 2005a. "Appropriation and Authorship in Contemporary Art." In *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 45, No. 2: 123–137.

Irvin, S. 2005b. "The Artist's Sanction in Contemporary Art." In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 4 (63): 315–326.

Irvin, S. 2006. "Museums and the Shaping of Contemporary Artworks." In *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 21:2, 143–156.

Irvin, S. 2008. "The Ontological Diversity of Visual Artworks." In *New Waves in Aesthetics*., edited by Stock K. and Thomson-Jones K., 1–19. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jadzińska, M. 2011. "The lifespan of Installation Art." In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice of Installation Art*., edited by Scholte, T. and Glenn, W., 21–31. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Kopytoff, I. 1986. "The cultural biography of things: Commoditization as a process." In *The social life of things. Commodities in cultural perspective*., edited by Appadurai A., 64–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Krauss, R.E. and Rowell, M. 1972. *Joan Miro: Magnetic Fields*, exh. cat., New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Laermans, R. 2008. "Deconstructing Individual Authorship: Artworks as Collective Products of Art Worlds." In *Art & Law*, edited by Demarsin, B., Schrage, E.J.H., Tilleman, B. and Verbeke, A.L., 50–61. Belgium: die Keure.

Laurenson, P. 2005 [1999]. "The Conservation and Documentation of Video Art." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 263–271. London: Archetype Publications.

Laurenson, P. 2006. "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations." In *Tate Papers: Tate's Online Research Journal*, 6. Available at: www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7401. [Accessed 25 September 2019].

Laurenson, P. 2016. "Can artworks live in a museum collection?" Talk presented at MoMA, NY 19 September 2016. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/184868009> [Accessed 25 September 2019].

Learner, T. 2008. "The Object in Transition: A Cross-disciplinary Conference on the Preservation and Study of Modern and Contemporary Art." *CeROArt*. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/ceroart/425> [Accessed 25 September 2019].

Lind, M. and Konsthall, T. eds. 2012. *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Livingston, P. 2005. "Authorship, Individual and Collective." In *Art and Intention*, 62–90. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Livingston, P. 2016. "History of the Ontology of Art." *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, edited by Zalta E. N. (Summer 2016 Edition). Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/art-ontology-history/>. [Accessed 16 March 2020].

Livingston, P. and Archer, C. 2010. Artistic Collaboration and the Completion of Works of Art. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vo. 50, N. 4: 439–455.

- Lubow, A. 2019. "The Ultimate Video Art Retreat." Available at: www.nytimes.com/2019/03/07/arts/design/kramlich-video-herzog-de-meuron.html [Accessed 30 March 2020].
- Macedo, R. 2006. "The Artist, the Curator, the Restorer and Their Conflicts within the Context of Contemporary Art." In *Theory and Practice in Conservation: A Tribute to Cesare Brandi: International Seminar*, edited by Rodrigues, D. J. and Mimoso, M. J., 393–398. Lisbon: National Laboratory of Civil Engineering.
- Macedo, R., Nogueira, A. and Marçal, H. 2012. "The Conservator as a Performer." *Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series*, No: ART2012–0087.
- Maclaren, N. and Werner, A. 1950. "Some Factual Observations about Varnishes and Glazes." *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 92, No. 568, 189–92.
- Mag Uidhir, C. 2011. "Minimal Authorship (of Sorts)." *Philosophical Studies*, 154, no. 3: 373–87.
- Mag Uidhir, C. 2013. *Art and Art-Attempts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mancusi-Ungaro, C. 2005 [1999]. "Original Intent: The Artist's Voice." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 392–393. London: Archetype Publications.
- Mancusi-Ungaro, C. 2007. "Authority and Ethics." *Tate's Online Research Journal* Available at: www.tate.org.uk/file/carol-mancusi-ungaro-authority-and-ethics [Accessed 20 March 2020].
- Marçal, H. 2019. "Contemporary Art Conservation." Published as part of the research project *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum*, Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible/research-approach-conservation>, [Accessed 11 March 2020].
- Marçal, H. and Macedo, R. 2017. "The aim of documentation: Micro-decisions in the documentation of performance-based artworks." In *ICOM–CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints, Copenhagen, 4–8 September 2017*, edited by J. Bridgland. Paris: International Council of Museums.
- Marijnissen, R.H. 1996 [1963]. "Degradation, Conservation, and Restoration of Works of Art: Historical Overview." In *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, edited by Stanley Price, N., Kirby Talley M. Jr. and Melucco. Vaccaro, A., 275–280. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.
- Martinon, J.P. 2013. *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Matero, F. 2000. "Ethics and Policy in Conservation." *The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter*, 15.1: 5–8.
- Matos, L. 2010. "The permanent nature of the ephemeral: strategies for survival." In *Ephemeral Art and Conservation. The Paradigm of Contemporary Art and Ethnographic Objects*, edited by Macedo, R. and Silva, R.H. 3–9. Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte.

Matos, L., Macedo, R. and Heydenreich, G. eds. 2015. *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art*. Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte.

McCoy, R. 2009. "Concepts Around Interviewing Artists: A Discussion with Glenn Wharton." Available at: <http://blog.art21.org/2009/10/20/concepts-around-interviewing-artists-a-discussion-with-glenn-wharton/#.V1FwEPI95hE> [Accessed 20 March 2020].

Merryman, J. H. 1976. "The Refrigerator of Bernard Buffet." *Hastings Law Journal*, Vol. 27, Issue 5. 1023–1049 Available at: https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_law_journal/vol27/iss5/3 [Accessed 20 March 2020].

Morgan, J. 2013. "What Is a Curator?" In *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating.*, edited by Hoffmann, J., 21–29. Milan: Mousse Publishing.

Muñoz Viñas, S. 2005. *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Muñoz Viñas, S. 2009. "Minimal Intervention Revisited." In *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, edited by Richmond A. and Bracker, A.L. 47–59. Burlington: Butterworth–Heinemann.

Noordegraaf, J. 2015. "Documenting the Analogue Past in Marijke Van Warmerdam's Film Installations." In *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art.*, edited by Matos, L., Macedo, R. and Heydenreich, G., 115–123. Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte.

Obrist, H.U. 2011 [2009]. *A Brief History of Curating*. Zurich, Dijon: JRP|Ringier and Les Presses du reel.

O'Neill, P. ed. 2007. *Curating Subjects*. London: Open Editions.

O'Neill, P. 2012. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M. eds. 2010. *Curating the Educational Turn*. London: Open Editions.

O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M. eds. 2013. *Curating Research*. London: Open Editions.

Pedrosa, A. 2013. "What Is the Process?" In *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating.*, edited by Hoffmann, J., 123–133. Milan: Mousse Publishing.

Peek, M. and Brokerhof, A. W. 1999. "Documentation and Registration of Artists' Material and Techniques: Proceedings." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 388–390. London: Archetype Publications.

- Petovic, D. 2005 [1999]. "Working With Artists in Order to Preserve Original Intent: Proceedings I." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 396–397. London: Archetype Publications.
- Phillips, J. 2012. Shifting Equipment Significance in Time-based Media Art. *Electronic Media Review*, Vol.1, 139–154.
- Phillips, J. 2015. "Reporting Iterations: A Documentation Model for Time-based Media Art." In *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art.*, edited by Matos, L., Macedo, R. and Heydenreich, G., 168–179. Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte.
- Plenderleith, H.J. 1998. "A history of conservation." *Studies in Conservation*, 43:3, 129–143. DOI: 10.1179/sic.1998.43.3.129
- Pugliese, M., Ferriani, B. and Rava, A. 2008. "Time, originality and materiality in contemporary art conservation. The theory of restoration by Cesare Brandi, between tradition and innovation." In *Preprints ICOM Committee for Conservation, 15th Triennial Conference New Delhi, 22–26 September 2008*, edited by Bridgland J., 475–479. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.
- Pullen, D. 1999. "Managing Change: The Conservation of Plastic Sculpture, Works by Naum Gabo and Tony Cragg." In *Material Matters: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture.*, edited by Heuman J., 100–107. London: Tate Gallery Publishing.
- Pullen, D. 2005 [1999]. "The challenges of a dual role." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 300–301. London: Archetype Publications.
- Pye, E. 2001. *Caring for the past, Issues in conservation and museums*. London: James and James.
- Ramirez, M.C. 1994. "Brokering identities: Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Representation." In *Thinking About Exhibitions*, edited by Ferguson, B.W., Greenberg, R., and Nairne, S., 21–38). London: Routledge.
- Ramsay-Jolicoeur, B.A. and Wainwright I.N.M. 1990. *Shared responsibility: proceedings of a seminar for curators and conservators*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada.
- Reijnders, T. 2015 [1999]. "A Shining Document of Our Time." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 149–153. London: Archetype Publications.
- Saaze, V. van. 2009a "Authenticity in Practice: An Ethnographic Study into the Preservation of One Candle by Nam June Paik." In *Art, Conservation and Authenticities. Material, Concept, Context*, edited by Hermens E. and Fiske T., 190–198. London: Archetype Publications.
- Saaze V. van. 2009b. "Doing Artworks: An Ethnographic Account of the Acquisition and Conservation of *No Ghost Just a Shell*." *Krisis: Journal of Contemporary Philosophy*, 1: 20–33.

- Saaze, V. van. 2009c. "From Intention to Interaction: Reframing the Artist's Interview in Conservation Research." In *Art Today — Cultural Property Tomorrow: The Conservation and Restoration of Contemporary Artworks*, edited by Stefanaggi M. and Hocquette R., 20–28. Paris: SFIIC/Institut National du Patrimoine. Conference Proceedings.
- Saaze, V. van. 2011a. "Acknowledging Differences: A Manifold of Museum." In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice of Installation Art.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Glenn W., 249–255. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Saaze, V. van. 2011b. "Going Public: Conservation of Contemporary Artworks. Between Backstage and Frontstage in Contemporary Art Museums." *Revista de História da Arte*, 8: 235–249. Available at: https://run.unl.pt/bitstream/10362/16705/1/RHA_8_ART_14_VVSaaze.pdf [Accessed 2 June 2019].
- Saaze, V. van. 2013. *Installation Art and the Museum. Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Saaze, V. van. 2015. "In the Absence of Documentation. Remembering Tino Sehgal's constructed situations." In *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art.*, edited by Matos, L., Macedo, R. and Heydenreich, G., 55–63. Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte.
- Saunders, C. 2012. "Image Documentation for Paintings Conservation." In *Conservation of Easel Paintings*, edited by Stoner, J. H. and Rushfield, R., 277–280. London: Routledge.
- Schubert, K. 2009. *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*. London: Ridinghouse.
- Sease, C. 1996. "A short history of archaeological conservation." *Studies in Conservation*, 41:sup1, 157–161, DOI: 10.1179/sic.1996.41.Supplement-1.157
- Sellers, P. 2007. "Collective Authorship in Film." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 65, No. 3: 263–271.
- Sheikh, S. 2013. "Towards the Exhibition as Research." In *Curating Research*, edited by Paul O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M., 32–46. London: Open Editions.
- Smit, I. 2015 [1999]. "The Transitory Nature of Memory." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 93–98. London: Archetype Publications.
- Smith, T. 2012. *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. New York: Independent Curators International.
- Sommermeier, B. 2005. "Interview with Ross Sinclair Regarding the Artwork Journey to the Edge of the World – The New Republic of St. Kilda (1999/2002), Hamburger Kunsthalle." Published at the Inside Installations project-website www.inside-installations.org, June 2007. Available at www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/13322839/artist-interview-pdf-2637kb-inside-installations [Accessed 2 May 2020].

- Sommermeier, B. 2011. "Who's Right – the Artist or the Conservator?" In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Wharton, G., 143–151. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Sterrett, J. and Coddington, J. 2017 "Codifying Fluidity." In *VoCA Journal*, June 30, 2017, Available at: <https://journal.voca.network/codifying-fluidity/> [Accessed 10 March 2020].
- Stigter, S. 2004. "Living artist, living artwork? The problem of faded colour photographs in the work of Ger van Elk." In *Modern Art, New Museums: Contributions to the 2004 IIC Congress, Bilbao.*, edited by Roy, A. and Smith, P., 105–108. London: International Institute for Conservation.
- Stigter, S. 2015. "Co-producing conceptual art: a conservator's testimony." In *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art.*, edited by Matos, L., Macedo, R. and Heydenreich, G., 103–114. Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte.
- Stigter, S. 2016a. "Autoethnography as a new approach in conservation." *Studies in Conservation*, 61:sup2, 227–232.
- Stigter, S. 2016b. "Through the conservator's lens: from analogue photowork to digital printout. How is authenticity served?" In *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation.*, edited by Hermens, E. and Robertson, F., 169–178. London: Archetype Publications.
- Hill Stoner, J. 2005. "Changing Approaches in Art Conservation: 1925 to the Present." In *(Sackler NAS Colloquium) Scientific Examination of Art: Modern Techniques in Conservation and Analysis*, edited by National Research Council, 40–52. Washington, DC: National Academic Press.
- Stringari, C. 2015 [1999]. "Installations and Problems of Preservation." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 272–281. London: Archetype Publications.
- Sturman, S. 2005 [1999]. "Necessary Dialogue: The Artist as Partner in Conservation." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 393–396. London: Archetype Publications.
- Temkin, A. 1999. "Strange Fruit." In *Mortality/Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art.*, edited by Corzo M., 45–50. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.
- Teutonico, J.M. and Matero, F. eds. 2003. *Managing Change: Sustainable Approaches to the Conservation of the Built Environment*. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.
- Umpleby, S. 2003. "Determining the Artist's Intent in Order to Be Able to Conserve Modern and Contemporary Art." *SSCR Journal*, Vol. 14, N. 1, 16–17.
- UNESCO. 2004. "Co-operation and coordination between the UNESCO Conventions concerning heritage: the Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage." Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137634> [Accessed 4 March 2015].

Vall, R. van de. 2015a. "Documenting Dilemmas. On the Relevance of Ethically Ambiguous Cases." In *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art.*, edited by Matos, L., Macedo, R. and Heydenreich, G., 7–17. Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte.

Vall, R. van de. 2015b. "The Devil and the Details: The Ontology of Contemporary Art in Conservation Theory and Practice." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 55, 3; 285–302.

Vall, R. van de, Hölling, H., Scholte, T. and Stigter, S. 2011. "Reflections on a Biographical Approach to Contemporary Art Conservation." In *ICOM-CC: 16th Triennial Conference, Lisbon, 19-23 September 2011*, WG Theory and History in Conservation. Conference paper.

Ventzislavov, R. 2014. "Idle Arts: Reconsidering the Curator." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 72, 1; 83-93.

Verbeeck, M. and Broers, N. 2016. "Conservation of contemporary art: from concepts to practice, *Cloaca* by Wim Delvoye." In *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation.*, edited by Hermens, E. and Robertson, F., 141–148. London: Archetype Publications.

Villers, C. 2004. "Post Minimal Intervention." *The Conservator*, 28:3–10.

Wagner, F. 2011. "Light – a Hybrid Medium: Suggestions for the Documentation and Preservation of Artworks Based on Light Technology." In *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice of Installation Art.*, edited by Scholte, T. and Glenn W., 195–204. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Wegen, D. H. van. 2015 [1999]. "Between Fetish and Score: The Position of the Curator of Contemporary Art." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 201–209. London: Archetype Publications.

Westbrook, L. 2016. "Team Media: In Action, in Contemplation." Available at: www.sfmoma.org/read/team-media-action-contemplation/ [Accessed 25 September 2019].

Wetzel, L. 2018. "Types and Tokens." *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, edited by Zalta, E. N. (Fall 2018 Edition). Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/types-tokens/>. [Accessed 16 March 2020].

Weyer, C. and Heydenreich, G. 2005 [1999]. "From Questionnaires to a Checklist for Dialogues." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Hummelen, IJ. and Sillé, D., 385–388. London: Archetype Publications.

Wilson, M. 2007. "Making New." In *Curating Subjects*, edited by O'Neill, P., 194–200. London: Open Editions.

Wimsatt, W.K. Jr. and Beardsley, M. C. 1954. "The Intentional Fallacy." In *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Wharton, G. 2005. "The Challenges of Conserving Contemporary Art." In *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*, edited by Altshuler, B., 163–178. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wharton, G. 2015. Artist Intention and the Conservation of Contemporary Art. *AIC Objects Specialty Group Postprints*, 22.

Wharton, G. 2016. "Reconfiguring contemporary art in the museum." In *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation.*, edited by Hermens, E. and Robertson, F., 27–36. London: Archetype Publications.

Wharton, G. and Molotch, H. 2009. "The Challenge of Installation Art." In *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, edited by Richmond A. and Bracker, A. L. 210–222. Burlington: Butterworth–Heinemann.

Wielocha, A. 2016. "Between curator and the artist: a problem of authority." In *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation.*, edited by Hermens, E. and Robertson, F., 54–61. London: Archetype Publications.

Wollheim, R. 1980 [1968]. *Art and its Objects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

World Heritage Committee. 1994. "Nara Document on Authenticity." *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Eighteenth Session, Phuket, Thailand, 12–17 December 1994*. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/nara94.htm> [Accessed 10 March 2021].

Yaneva, A. 2003a. "Chalk Steps on the Museum floor: The "Pulses" of Objects in an Art Installation." *Journal of Material Culture*, 8(2), 169–188.

Yaneva, A. 2003b. "When a Bus Met a Museum: Following Artists, Curators and Workers in Art Installation." *Museum and Society*, 1 (3): 116–131.

Žerovc, B. 2015. *When Attitudes Become the Norm; The Contemporary Curator and Institutional Art*. Ljubljana/Berlin: Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory (IZA)/Archive Books.

Referenced Interviews Conducted for the Purpose of this Research

Theodoraki, M. and Berger, M. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Chéroux, C. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Crippa, E. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Curtis, P. 2017.

Theodoraki, M. and Estrela, A. 2017.

Theodoraki, M. and Frieling, R. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Frohnert, C. 2016.

Theodoraki, M. and Laurensen, P. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Phillips, J. 2016.

Theodoraki, M. and Roberts, S. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Sterrett, J. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Trotman, N. 2018.

Theodoraki, M. and Wharton, G. 2016.

Appendices

Appendix I

Examples of artworks with regard to the different types of transgression

Transgressing temporal norms

In *Strange Fruit (For David)* (1993-1998) by Zoe Leonard, the artist presented a series of eaten fruits whose skins she sewed back to their original shape. The skins' decomposition is intended to advance naturally over time and across displays. Whereas, eventually, time will eradicate any other presence and the artwork will persist with no material referent.²⁵⁷

Transgressing the artwork's orthodox relationship with the exhibition space

Artist Michael Asher in his artwork *Kunsthalle Bern, 1992* (1992) gathered all, seventeen, radiators from the public areas of Kunsthalle Bern (across seven galleries and two floors) and placed them in the entryway gallery of the institution, alongside the two radiators already installed there as part of the building's heating infrastructure. During the exhibition, all radiators were kept in functional mode (heating the space), through a system of long steel pipes that connected the relocated units (and also guided visitors) to their former position.²⁵⁸

Transgressing standard ways of relating

The artwork *Bicho* (1960) by Lygia Clark involves a series of objects developed between 1960 and 1964. Each object consists of a number of metal plates attached together with hinges. The plates are intended by the artist to be physically animated by the audience's hands, this single intention, inscribed in the object, prescribes a different relationship between artwork and audience. Without an interacting audience the object lies flat. It is the audience's interaction/touch/energy that permit the object to become the artwork, i.e., the animated entity that the title (*Bicho* –having been interpreted in English as *animal*, *beast*, *creature*, or *critter*)²⁵⁹ refers to.

²⁵⁷ For more information on the artwork, see: Ann Temkin 1999.

²⁵⁸ For more information on the artwork, see: Rorimer 2012.

²⁵⁹ For reference to these interpretations, see respectively: Brett 1987, 68; de Zegher 1996, 34; www.henry-moore.org/whats-on/2014/09/24/lygia-clark-organic-planes [accessed 15 March 2020]; Lepecki 2014, 279.

Transgressing the ontological precedents of visual arts

In *Failures of Aviation* (2010) by Angus Braithwaite, the artist meticulously created ten miniature models of airships, following available historical documentation of the first experimental airship prototypes constructed by selected aviation pioneers. Braithwaite's miniatures were made with attention to detail, they required aesthetic decisions and involved lengthy labour by the artist, however, they are not the artwork. *Failures of Aviation* is not an artifact, it is an event, an one hour performance lecture that took place on the 7th of December 2010.²⁶⁰ During this lecture the artist destroyed one model after the other, in ways that *each* resembled the destruction of its corresponding airship prototype.²⁶¹

Transgressing the conventional frame of a fixed materiality

In *News* (1969/2008) by Hans Haacke, inside the exhibition space, on top of a table, there is a machine which prints on a roll of paper the news that are fed to it in real time, from news providers chosen by the artist. Tables of different sizes and different materials, printing devices of different technologies, perforated and non-perforated rolls of paper, can all be used in instantiating the same artwork.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ The performance lecture was part of the 2010 Whitstable Biennale.

²⁶¹ For a short video documentation of the performance lecture, visit: www.angusbraithwaite.com/Failures-Of-Aviation-performance-documentation [accessed 20 June 2020].

²⁶² For information on how the work has been adjusted since the initial 1969 instantiation, see: Barok et al. 2019.

Appendix II

Example of an unfolding artwork: *Predictive Engineering* (1993–present) by Julia Scher

Predictive Engineering (1993–present) by Julia Scher, a site-specific and interactive, video and sound installation incorporating surveillance technologies, is a characteristic case of an unfolding artwork. The media that form part of *Predictive Engineering* is a combination of live and pre-recorded, fictional and non-fictional material captured from cameras and microphones placed inside the museum; combined with pre-recorded, spoken-word comments; and, computer graphics. The work was first conceived and produced, in 1993, for the former SFMOMA building on Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco. In 1998 the work had its second instantiation, this time at the current SFMOMA site. For this instantiation Scher adapted the work to the new space, and also added to the original components both new footage and an interactive web project. 18 years later, in 2016 the SFMOMA Artist Initiative project supported a third instantiation of the work. The material from 1993 and 1998 were joined by new material produced on site in the now expanded SFMOMA building. Additionally, the new instantiation featured footage captured by drones, as well as a text-messaging service.

What I describe here, is an artwork that has undergone substantial change between its different instantiations: for every show, the work is produced and reproduced in response to, and in interaction with, the space and time it is situated in. The artwork, across its three instantiations, not only embraces and reflects the changes in its exhibition/spatial landscape, it also incorporates and addresses the relevant developments in the technological landscape of its time. Additionally, *Predictive Engineering* is a generative work: every instantiation produced new materials to be potentially used in subsequent ones. *Predictive Engineering* exemplifies the notion of an unfolding artwork: an artwork conceived and designed by its author to be evolving throughout its exhibition life. This is also evoked by the fact that Julia Scher discusses the work in the realm of “Durational Aesthetics” a concept that she defines as referring to “what things look like cumulatively, over time.”²⁶³ The artwork’s unfolding nature is further confirmed through its dating as well as through its titling. The work is dated “1993 to present”

²⁶³ See “SFMOMA: Julia Scher Artist Talk” that took place on 15 September 2017, page 13 of the transcript: https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/sfmomamedia/media/uploads/files/Transcript_Julia_Scher_Artist_Talk_09_15_2017.pdf [accessed 10 June 2020].

and the title of the work is adapted for each instantiation: being “Predictive Engineering to the power of two” in the case of the 1998 instantiation and “Predictive Engineering to the power of three” in the case of the 2016 instantiation. The artwork’s unfolding through time is, thus, defined by the artist as an exponentiation, a repeated multiplication of its self —as the title insinuates, with each iteration, the artwork’s identity is fortified. *Predictive Engineering* can be discussed as a timeline: tracing developments in the life of a museum, tracing the behaviour of the audience across time, tracing advances in technologies of tracing the world. The above characteristics make clear that being unfolding/evolving/in-development is an intrinsic element of Predictive Engineering; the continual change between its manifestations is what actually keeps its identity intact.

Appendix III

Legislation and artist's intent

[I]n our culture, authorship is particularly salient with respect to art because we understand and appreciate artworks primarily as the expressions of their authors. A beautifully designed smartphone may embody just as much of its designer's talent, skill, and vision as any work of art, but we value the phone for what it can do for us, first, and think about the intentions of its author, if at all, only secondarily. Artworks, on the other hand, put the expressive intentions of their authors up front and centre as their *raison d'être*. Thus, when we encounter an artwork as appreciators and interpreters it is especially important to ascertain whether the work in question is the work that the artist intended. Moral rights are designed to ensure precisely this. They protect artists from misrepresentations of their work and its authorship after it has left their immediate control. (Gover 2018, 162)

As philosopher Karen Gover remarks in the quote above, artists are culturally and legally approached as having a unique type of connection with their artworks. This becomes explicit in moral rights legislations which are addressed as aiming to protect the artist's personality.²⁶⁴ The artist's moral rights are protected by national laws (for instance, in the United States through the 1990 Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA)) but also internationally through a revision to the 1886 Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works that took place in 1928.

Moral rights can vary by country; however, they always include the right of attribution and the right of integrity. The right of attribution (or else right of paternity) is the right of the artist to claim, or disclaim, authorship of a work. While the right of integrity is the right of the artist to prevent and object to the work's alteration and destruction. For instance, in the Berne Convention it is articulated as the artist's right "to object to any distortion, mutilation or other modification of, or other derogatory action in relation to, the said work, which would be

²⁶⁴ For a discussion of the civil law classification of the moral rights of the artist as rights of personality (which include, for instance, the rights to one's identity, to a name, to one's reputation, and to the integrity of one's person) –in contrast, for instance, to copyright which is a kind of property right that protects the artist's economic interest in their work– as well as for the differences in law that exist between different countries, see: Merryman et al. 2007 [1979], 419-579.

prejudicial to his honour or reputation.”²⁶⁵ Additionally, in selected cases, moral rights include the right of disclosure and the right of withdrawal.²⁶⁶ The right of disclosure (or else right of divulgation) concerns the artist’s right to decide whether or not to release a work to the public. While the right of withdrawal can permit the artist to withdraw or modify an artwork that has entered the public sphere.

As Martha Buskirk has observed “the right of artists to prevent alteration or destruction of their work has been articulated as one that supersedes property rights” (Buskirk 2003, 49). In other words, the artists’ metaphysical bond with their artworks and their creative authority over them are approached in legislation as of a higher priority than that of artefactual ownership. To understand the rationale of this verdict we would need to consider the wider purpose of the moral rights legislation which extends beyond the mere protection of the artist’s individual interests. Law scholar John Henry Merryman has notably raised a discussion about moral rights protecting a “collective social interest” (Merryman 1976, 1041):

Art is an aspect of our present culture and our history; it helps tell us who we are and where we came from. To revise, censor, or improve the work of art is to falsify a piece of the culture. We are interested in protecting the work of art for public reasons, and the moral right of the artist is in part a method of providing for private enforcement of this public interest. (ibid.)

²⁶⁵ For access to the Convention visit the site of the United Nations (UN) agency World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), visit: www.wipo.int/treaties/en/text.jsp?file_id=283698#P123_20726 [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁶⁶ An example is French legislation, discussed as a pioneer in protecting the artist’s moral rights. See: Peeler 1999, 427.

Appendix IV

Excerpt from 2016 interview with conservator Joanna Phillips

“Every artwork is different, that is why we sit down with artists when we acquire their pieces to determine which significances we, or the artist assigns to the different components[...] Interestingly, in the past, when we set the Variable Media Initiative, 10 years ago, these interviews were called *Variable Media Interviews* and they have come to be called the *Conservation Interviews*, because we, the conservation department, is holding the main responsibility to make sure that we have all that info that we need for the future display in the collection. So, they are now called the *Conservation Interview*, or the *Intake Interview* and they are usually prepared by us. So, before we meet with the artist, we complete our, so called, *Identity Reports*, where you really look at the artwork, we look at the exhibition history and how the work changed across previous iterations, and we research on the internet and we look at the artist-provided installation instructions. And we usually come up with a whole ton of questions that are still open, or contradictions, or missing information, from the perspective of the person whose future responsibility is going to be to put the work together again.

We simply don’t have all the parts together and we identify those parts, and that is what the interview consists in. We never ask the artist (there is a complete misperception on that, from way back) we never ask the artist: “how should we restore your work, or conserve your work in the future?” We basically start interviews by summarizing the exhibition history “your piece was installed five times, there and there, is there one iteration you liked more? Is there another iteration that you didn’t like at all? What are the reasons for that?” And then usually, he or she, starts talking, and in very complex situations we would say “what does the work actually consist of? What are the elements of it? What are the components? So, do I understand correctly that it can be activated in this way, or, that way?”

It is almost a ‘transmission interview’ where we try to get all the knowledge on board, that we feel necessary to steward the work in the future, and that is why it is called ‘Conservation Interview’, because it is all about future exhibitions. But we have the curators, we always share our questions ahead of time with the curatorial

department, who often will have other questions that pertain to the meaning of the piece, or the way that the title should be phrased, or whether it should be double-dated or not. And if they write a publication (where the piece is mentioned) they might have other questions too. So, they usually add those questions, and then we have a very organised discussion with the artist where we really try to cover all these different areas.

We used to do [the interviews] in video, but there becomes a whole other issue of video conservation, and we found that most of the time, what we want are the transcripts, that is how we search things that the artist said. So now in most cases we only do audio but we always take pictures, still images of the room, of the group of people, and then we record on the audio recording: "Today is this date, this time, we are meeting at this location to discuss this artwork and in the room are..." and then we go around, so whoever is transcribing it, links the name of the person to the sound of the voice. And when we look at images together, which we often do, one of us will always remind the future listener of the audio: "We are looking at this, we are looking at that iteration." So, we make it consumable for someone who is just reading the transcript or listening to the audio recording.

I probably do 30 or 40 a year, we have 30 to 40 new acquisitions in media and performance every year, so, I do one for every, and sometimes, on top of that, for other artworks that were already in the collection "the artist is here so let's do it now." The research takes a couple of days but I have my fellows who can do that, and it is very interesting for them, it is very interesting work, I wish I had more time doing that research. So, I have them propose questions and we talk over them internally and it is a process, sometimes it takes two days to prep for an interview, I would say. But I don't have to do that myself, I am usually looking at the questions and completing them and then, I usually lead the interview, like as a moderator, or, as a lead questioner." (Theodoraki and Phillips 2016)

Appendix V

Examples of Contemporary Art Conservation Studies in 2019

University of Amsterdam (UVA), Netherlands. UVA does not provide a Bachelor's (BA) in conservation. Students need a three-year Bachelor's degree in humanities or science (preferably with a six-month minor in Conservation and Restoration) in order to enrol to the provided four-year postgraduate programme Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage (two-year Master's (MA) followed by a two-year Post MA). Only after the full four years of the postgraduate studies, students qualify as conservators-restorers. Contemporary Art is one of the ten specialisations on offer. Reading through the descriptions of the courses that are part of the Contemporary Art MA, the physical status and the treatment of an object seem to be the targeted focus of the overall programme. For instance, in the Object Based Practical course (which amounts to half of the credits of the whole MA) the course's content is described as: "Plastics (history, production process, identification, degradation, conservation); Tools, making process and techniques; Surface cleaning in theory and practice; Reconstruction; Consolidation / Adhesives in theory and practice; Artist interview in theory and practice; Filling."²⁶⁷ While for the Master's Thesis (18 out of 120 credits) the study area is described as follows: "study on the material/technical characteristics, production process and ageing/degradation (including wear-and-tear) of an object or objects of cultural or historical value."²⁶⁸ Further, when comparing Contemporary Art with a different specialisation (for instance Glass and Ceramics), the two specialisations are approached with the same focus on materials and physical properties, the course titles are the same across specialisations, and in terms of the content of the courses the only two differences are: firstly, in the addition of training in artist interviews (in the case of Contemporary Art specialisation); and secondly, in the materials that are studied (for instance, plastics in the case of Contemporary Art, glazed ceramics in Glass and Ceramics).

Outside the Conservation department, the Media Studies department of UVA provides a one-and-a-half-year Dual Master's programme in Preservation and Presentation of the Moving Image which focuses on moving image and sound. The programme is presented as inviting students "to critically engage with current practices of collecting and selecting, preserving and restoring, making accessible, presenting and curating moving images and

²⁶⁷ See: <http://www.uva.nl/en/disciplines/conservation-and-restoration/specialisations/specialisations/contemporary-art/contemporary-art.html> [accessed 18 February 2019].

²⁶⁸ Same as above.

sound” approaching preservation and presentation as entirely interlinked activities of a critical and conceptual nature. The programme coordinator, assistant professor Eef Masson is not a conservator, instead has a background in Germanic languages and literature, as well as in film studies and media archiving.

Universidade Nova de Lisboa (UNL), Portugal. UNL provides both BA and MA level training in Conservation and Restoration, however it doesn’t provide a specialisation in contemporary art. The department’s orientation is clearly on natural sciences and on restoration techniques. For instance, in the BA, out of the 180 total credits of the degree, the ones that are on social sciences and humanities are 24 (6 in History of Ancient Art, 6 in History of Medieval Art, 6 in History of Modern Art and 6 in History of Contemporary Art), there are also 6 credits on Cultural Heritage Law and 6 on Cultural Management. Although, this review on training is to address the basic training for a student to qualify as a conservator-restored and thus I am not looking on doctorate studies, it is important to make an exception for NOVA to note something unusual. It is interesting that, although the UAL BA and MA address the subject of contemporary art only through the courses in art history, there many conservation doctorates conducted in UNL which address the contemporary art perpetuation challenge in all its complexity (reflecting the research interests of professor Rita Macedo). This fact makes evident that the department is aware of the contemporary art conservation challenges and the relevant discourse, however, it chooses to engage with it only on a research/doctoral level and not to address it in its curricula through specialised training.

Bern University of the Arts (BUA), Switzerland. BUA offers a three-year BA in conservation and as part of it, students can have one year of pre-specialisation in the field of modern materials or media conservation. Students in BUA can continue their studies with a two-year specialised MA in Conservation-Restoration of Modern Materials and Media. As it is evident by the study topics the programme has a clear focus on material and technological training. This is also confirmed by conservator Agathe Jarczyk (at the time a Professor in the BUA programme) who, in a 2018 presentation, explained that the *Modern Materials and Media* programme “is very material based, that is why it is called *Conservation of Modern Material and Media*, adding that “the Conservation Department in Bern is known for its strength in

natural sciences and that is also the reason why it is not called “Conservation of contemporary art.”²⁶⁹

Institute of Fine Arts (IFA), New York University. IFA is a graduate school providing studies in art history, conservation and curation. The degree in conservation is a four-year Dual MS/MA (M.S. in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works and M.A. in the History of Art and Archaeology) that comprises of three years of coursework and one year of internship. The programme accepts the most 8 students a year, alongside training in traditional media there is an option to specialise in Modern and Contemporary Art and there is also the Mellon Time-Based Media option. All students, across different specialisations, follow a mandatory two-year traditional conservation training (for instance, with courses in materials science and instrumental analysis) together with training in art history. Students interested in a contemporary art specialisation, alongside the mandatory training, can have access to special seminars on: “ethics, law, artist interviews, modern art technologies, replication issues and models for collaboration.” Students in The Mellon TBM specialisation, alongside the mandatory training, in their first year have access to “an overview course on time-based media technologies and their care” while on the second and third year of study they undergo advanced technological training supported by experts and specialists in the fields of computer science, engineering, and film and video preservation.

From the curriculum it is clear that the programme approaches the purpose of conservation as being that of artwork’s physical preservation and treatment, at the same time, addressing artworks as material entities. For instance, from the second year and throughout the third, students are involved in conservation treatment coursework carried out on actual conservation objects. The included processes are presented as such: “initial condition report writing; scientific analysis; treatment proposal writing; full documentation, written and photographic; full treatment completion; final report writing; and packing or rehousing.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ See: <https://vimeo.com/281796519>, at 01:35 [accessed 20 March 2020].

²⁷⁰ See: https://ifa.nyu.edu/pdfs/conservation/Conservation_courses.pdf [accessed 20 March 2019].

Appendix VI

Examples of Curatorial Studies in 2019: De Appel, Royal College of Art, Bard College

The De Appel Curatorial Programme (CP) was established in 1994 by former De Appel Director, the curator, art historian, and critical theorist Saskia Bos, while the current Director of De Appel is curator Monika Szewczyk. CP is a ten-month long intensive programme that does not lead to a formal qualification. De Appel instead of providing access to a curriculum²⁷¹, in a 300-word text, introduces the programme's values and principles that evolve around: providing access to a strong network of practitioners; collaboration; a "free-thinking" and hands-on approach; and a focus on using precise language, on building strong alliance with artists, on addressing local contexts, and on broadening public access to art.²⁷² CP is also addressed as being fully integrated in the whole spectrum of De Appel's activities (the Archive, and the Educational Initiatives), indicative is the fact that the CP practitioners at the end of their term they design and implement the "Appel's Public Offering in Spring"²⁷³.

Beyond the content of the programme, I would like to focus here on another aspect. CP invites applications from "local and international curators, artists and cultural practitioners" and six individuals are chosen to participate to the programme each year. The selection process for admission to CP resembles the selection process for a prestigious prize. The participants to the programme are not selected by their future tutors or lecturers, they are instead selected by an international jury of prominent art professionals²⁷⁴. The CP participants are presented in the de Appel website with detailed bios and professionally taken photographs (the style that is usually used in a magazine feature).²⁷⁵ The jury who selected them is presented too as are all past participants, all members of past jury and a substantial list of selected past tutors, lecturers and guest teachers. To be honest about my observation, the web page introducing CP is a page filled with names of individuals: I counted 344 names (followed by the role of the named person) referred using regular font size. The 144 bios of all past participants (dating back to

²⁷¹ In CP's call for applications, it is it is broadly mentioned that the programme encompasses workshops, sessions, meetings, studio visits, site visits and research trips, see: <http://deappel.nl/nl/events/call-for-applications-2020-2021> [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁷² See: <http://deappel.nl/en/curatorial-programme#curriculum> [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁷³ The "Appel's Public Offering in Spring" refers to the centre's sessional public programme, it is understood that by deciding to term it broadly as "Public Offering" the centre does not want to limit the possible forms that this can involve (such as exhibitions, screenings, etc).

²⁷⁴ Claire Bishop (Critic and associate professor of Art History, CUNY); Charles Esche (director Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven); and, Kasper König (Museum Ludwig)

²⁷⁵ See: <http://deappel.nl/en/curatorial-programme#participants> [accessed 15 March 2020].

1994) are not only included but are also up to date.²⁷⁶ I insist on all these aspects because although they might seem irrelevant to the training that curators will have in CP, I believe they are highly relevant. By De Appel, providing almost no information about its CP curriculum and on the other hand providing a huge amount of information about the individuals involved in CP, I see it clearly stating out loud that curating is all about the signature of the distinct individual. An individual prepared to be on the foreground of cultural production, prepared for the visibility and exposure, and prepared to take a personal public stance on social issues. It is, for instance, telling that one of the only three questions that candidates are requested to respond to in their application to the programme is: “What is the social role of an exhibition in your experience and how do you want to change this?”²⁷⁷

The RCA two-year MA in Curating Contemporary Art (CCA) was founded in 1992 with the title of Visual Arts Administration: Curating and Commissioning Contemporary Art (VAA). At that time RCA was also providing a two-year MA in Conservation, run in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, the course (founded in 1987) admitted its last students in 2008²⁷⁸. In a 2006 article in the *Independent*²⁷⁹ the then Head of Department, curator and writer Mark Nash presents CCA by explaining: “we don't teach the museum conservation side of curating, where you could be dealing with paintings or 18th-century silverware. The course focuses on communication, on creating a discursive field around contemporary art, rather than just looking after paintings”. Fourteen years later, CCA presents itself as focussing on “commissioning, curating, and programming” and highlights two aspects of the course: providing “an awareness of wider social, political and economic contexts and an understanding of transnational contexts and issues of diversity and inclusion” and providing “the opportunity over a year-long period to work in collaboration with a key national arts organisation to develop a project – from proposal to realization”.²⁸⁰ In other words, CCA approaches the role of the curator, firstly, as having the responsibility to take position and intervene in the social arena, and secondly, as having the expertise to develop and realise public art projects. Further, CCA

²⁷⁶ See: <http://deappel.nl/en/curatorial-programme#previous-editions-alumni> [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁷⁷ The other two questions being: “Please introduce one artwork that you feel makes sense in Amsterdam, as you understand the city at this time” and “Motivate one project you would most eagerly like to realize in the next two years”. See: <http://deappel.nl/en/events/call-for-applications-2020-2021> [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁷⁸ www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/28449 [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁷⁹ The article written by Tim Walker has the bold subtitle “Who are the future directors of Tate Modern? The Royal College of Art's MA in curating contemporary art is leading a wave of courses for potential candidates”, see: www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/exhibiting-an-eye-for-the-contemporary-478702.html [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁸⁰ See: www.rca.ac.uk/schools/school-of-arts-humanities/cca/ [accessed 10 March 2020].

gives a particular emphasis to students' writing, assigning essays that combined, amount to a minimum of twenty thousand words, for each student.

Reflecting on the above, I would suggest that RCA prepares the curator, not for a role of a steward but instead for a role of an author. Fittingly to my observation, the current Head of Programme, curator Victoria Walsh (in an interview featured in RCA webpage) comments about the field of curating: "one of the shifts we've seen is in the emergence of the 'curatorial', a new form of practice in which it's very hard to distinguish between the practice of the artist and that of the curator. Programming and commissioning have collapsed that relationship, so curating is as much about creating fictional scenarios, spaces and speculative contexts, as gallery-based exhibitions."²⁸¹

The CCS Bard's graduate programme in curatorial studies (GPCS) was initiated in 1994 and, as in the case of RCA's CCA, it is a two-year programme of postgraduate studies and admits an average of fifteen students each year. Although since 2008 the Directors of GPCS have all been curators,²⁸² the first Director of GPCS (1991–2007), and the one who designed it, was Professor of Philosophy and Art History Norton Batkin²⁸³.

GPCS has both a practical and a theoretical focus, however courses in contemporary art history cover just two, out of the forty credits that are required for the completion of the course. GPCS, addressing the fact that current contemporary art practices engage strongly with subjects such as economics, geopolitics and philosophy, approaches curatorial training from a parallel angle including in its curricula intensive readings covering subjects such as "cultural studies, post-colonialism, immaterial labor, queer and feminist theory, and ideations of subjecthood".²⁸⁴ Artist and member of the CCS Bard graduate committee²⁸⁵ Liam Gillick has relatedly commented: "we give the students a framework to talk about things that are hard to talk about".²⁸⁶

Although CCS BRAD highlights the role of the curator as an active contributor to the political and social discourses, it also attends to the technical side of curating exhibitions and

²⁸¹ See: www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/rca-stories/conversation-with-victoria-walsh/ [accessed 10 March 2020].

²⁸² Maria Lind (2008–2010); Johanna Burton (2010–2012); Paul O'Neill (2013–2017); and, Lauren Cornell (2017–ongoing).

²⁸³ See: www.bard.edu/faculty/details/?id=103 [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁸⁴ See: <https://ccs.bard.edu/school/curriculum> [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁸⁵ The graduate committee, comprising of core faculty members and selected art professionals, is in charge of interviewing potential candidates to the programme, as well as guiding and evaluating students on major projects. See: <https://ccs.bard.edu/people/roles/2-graduate-committee> [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁸⁶ See: www.artandeducation.net/schoolwatch/169850/making-and-unmaking-the-curator-at-the-center-for-curatorial-studies-at-bard-college [accessed 15 March 2020].

projects. GPCS is fully integrated in a structure that includes the CCS Library and Archives as well as the Hessel Museum of Art, with a collection of more than 3000 works of contemporary art (including the Marieluise Hessel Collection of over 1,700 artworks)²⁸⁷ and CCS is indeed stressing the value of GPCS providing the opportunity to gain experience within a museum environment. However, in the extended presentation of GPCS in CCS webpage, there is no mention about collection care.²⁸⁸ Looking closely to the provided detailed curriculum, a related subject can be found within a long list of two-credit, elective courses which can be available for students to chooses. The particular seminar is indicated as exploring “the preservation of ephemeral forms like performance and media” and as all electives is intended to support students in developing “interdisciplinary perspectives”.²⁸⁹ In other words, the issues this seminar addresses are regarded as not primarily pertaining to the discipline of curating.

²⁸⁷ For instance, in 2019, one third of the period that the museum had displays open to the public, it was showcasing exhibitions and projects curated by GPCS students. See: <https://ccs.bard.edu/museum/exhibitions> [accessed 15 March 2020].

²⁸⁸ See: www.filepicker.io/api/file/U1SIJED7QVOfp2tNNd7H [accessed 15 March 2020].
And: <https://ccs.bard.edu/school/curriculum> [accessed: 15 March 2020].

²⁸⁹ See, page 14 in: www.filepicker.io/api/file/U1SIJED7QVOfp2tNNd7H [accessed 15 March 2020].

Appendices' Reference List

Barok, D., Noordegraaf, J. and De Vries, A.P. 2019. "From Collection Management to Content Management in Art Documentation: The Conservator as an Editor." *Studies in Conservation*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2019.1603921> [Accessed 25 August 2019].

Brett, G. 1987 "Lygia Clark: The Borderline Between Art and Life." *Third Text* (Autumn 1987): 68. 65–94.

Buskirk, M. 2003. *Contingent object of contemporary art*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Gover, K.E. 2018. *Art and Authority*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lepecki, A. 2014. "Affective geometry, immanent acts: Lygia Clark and performance." In *Lygia Clark: the Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988*, 278–293. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Merryman, J. H. 1976. "The Refrigerator of Bernard Buffet." *Hastings Law Journal*, Vol. 27, Issue 5. 1023–1049 Available at: https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_law_journal/vol27/iss5/3 [Accessed 20 March 2020].

Merryman, J. H., Urice, S.K. and Elsen A.E. 2007 [1979]. *Law, Ethics and the Visual Arts*. Alphen aan den Rijn: Kluwer Law International.

Peeler, C.D. 1999. "From the Providence of Kings to Copyrighted Things (and French Moral Rights)" *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review* 423, 423–456.

Rorimer, A. 2012. *Michael Asher Kunsthalle Bern 1992*. London: Afterall Books.

Theodoraki, M. and Phillips, J. 2016.

de Zegher, C. 1996. *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and From the Feminine*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

